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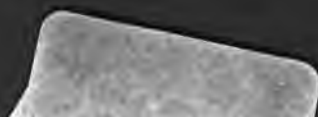
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LANCASHIRE'S LESSON.



LANCASHIRE'S LESSON;

OR,

THE NEED OF A SETTLED POLICY

IN TIMES OF

EXCEPTIONAL DISTRESS.

A LETTER ADDRESSED TO THE

Right Hon. CHARLES PELHAM VILLIERS, M.P.,

President of the Poor Law Board.

BY

W. T. M. TORRENS,

AUTHOR OF "INDUSTRIAL HISTORY OF FREE NATIONS,"

"LIFE OF SIR J. GRAHAM," ETC.

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TO
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
CHARLES PELHAM VILLIERS, M.P.,
PRESIDENT OF THE POOR LAW BOARD.

MY DEAR SIR,

I address the following observations to you rather than to any other person, because, in my anxiety to win assent to the view of public policy which they are intended to illustrate, I am especially desirous of obtaining your approval, as head of the great department, one of whose chief administrative difficulties would in future be obviated thereby.

Twice in the course of recent years, we have seen the applicability of the general laws of Poor Relief to unusual circumstances, suddenly brought into question. We have seen the public confidence in their adequacy, without examination or experiment, fail; and we have witnessed a series of legislative efforts

to grapple with unlooked-for calamity, for which no individual minister may perhaps be held responsible, but of which no minister can feel historically proud. The mysterious destruction of the potato crop in 1847, dislocated in a few weeks the whole mechanism of ordinary Poor Relief in Ireland, and led Parliament and people to adopt measures, unprecedented in their magnitude, to save human life, above all praise in their design, but as the event proved, below all vindication in their incoherency and inaptitude. You and I voted for most of those measures; for like other persons, whatever may have been our misgivings in such a crisis, we dared not demur: and I am sure that you look back upon the sad record of that time with feelings not unlike my own. If a similar calamity in character, even though not in extent, should occur, ought we not to try and be better prepared to meet it? More recently the population of Lancashire, and of portions of the adjacent counties, have been brought as unexpectedly face to face with famine, by the all but universal cessation of the cotton manufacture; and after an effort very brief and very par-

tial, people and Parliament seem to have renounced all idea of relying upon local rates as a sufficient means of providing for the exigency. The confluent streams of national benevolence rose so rapidly as fairly to sweep the administration of Poor Relief from its moorings; while Government was content to look on, watching the ebb and flow of the flood, and sometimes making an attempt to direct or divert it, but with so tardy and irresolute a hand as hardly to render the results distinctively appreciable.

You will not, I am sure, mistake my motive in saying this for one of disrespect or unkindness. I am confident that personally you had no wish to do anything but that which was right in the matter; and the part you have borne in great affairs sufficiently proves your political capacity and courage. But you had to deal with a concatenation of perplexities for which public policy had made no provision. The first principles on which a system of exceptional measures to meet exceptional distress ought to be founded, were not only unsettled, but unthought of by the Legislature. An absolute ruler, if he be a man of transcendent genius,

may possibly, in the paroxysm of a nation's agony, divine the secret of cure, and prescribe unfalteringly what will heal for the time without eventually hurting. But the risk of such miracle-working, a sober and a free people are not disposed to run. They prefer if need be, to put their hands deep into their pockets for lavish and indiscriminate alms, and to see their rulers potter about remedies and prescriptions of all sorts, even though nobody says he thoroughly believes in any of them : and few ministers in such a state of things will venture to take a bold and decisive course, for no minister, if he did, would probably be supported.


And if exceptional distress, resulting from dearth of food or want of work, were a calamity so rare that in sober calculation we could afford to let each generation take its chance of escaping it, the mind of the country would probably be disposed to turn a deaf ear to unwelcome admonitions to forethought, and would hush any occasional utterance of apprehension, with an indolent misreading of the maxim that "sufficient for the day is the evil thereof." Your

long and minute study of the course of our national industry will doubtless have satisfied you, however, that such is not the case. The extraordinary expansion of our foreign trade, while it tends to the unparalleled augmentation of wealth amongst us, is not unaccompanied with grave national hazards; and of these, perhaps the gravest is the liability to sudden displacements of labour at home, to an extent and for a length of time which no man can venture to compute. The immediate causes of such suspensions of employment it were foreign to my present purpose to discuss. We know them to be as various as the mutations of enterprise and the caprices of fashion; as much beyond the ken of the humble and thrifty artificer, as of the keenest-scented diplomatist; as incalculable by the laws of commercial prudence, as unchecked by the dictates of political wisdom. Whenever any man shall be able to foretell when a fire may break out in a neighbour's house, and how the wind will blow at the time, he may with a certain show of self-complacent shrewdness, affect to laugh at the precaution which provides a fire-escape, a parish

engine, and a supply of water ready for use when wanted: but not till then. That for which I plead is, not that the existing code of Poor Relief, in any of its fundamental principles should be changed, but that a supplemental chapter should be added to it, making provision betimes against the dire aggravations of popular distress, which come not of individual unthrift or folly, but which, like the ruin wrought by earthquake or invasion, may safely be treated specifically, and ought in my opinion to be so.

For the maintenance in its integrity of the general and permanent law of relief I am as steadfast an advocate as any one: and therefore I am averse from the attempt to strain its provisions in circumstances for which it was never meant to provide, and equally averse from the misapplication of its forms to a wholly different system of relief, when their essential spirit has been mesmerized into inaction. In 1834 I was, with our late lamented friend Sir G. C. Lewis, charged to make the public inquiries which led to the extension of the existing Poor Law to Ireland; and since then I have never ceased to watch with interest

and care the working of the system on both sides of the Channel. It has been my good fortune to have had many opportunities of comparing my own impressions, from time to time, with those of men engaged in the central and local administration of the law; and I venture to think that the opinions contained in the following pages will meet with the assent of many whose practical judgment is entitled to far more weight than mine. If I did not think so, I should hardly trouble you on the subject; for without a concurrence of opinion weighty and influential, no such addition to the existing law as that which I propose, could or ought to be adopted. All I venture to ask of you, as responsible head of the department, is to inquire dispassionately how the best and wisest men read the recent lesson of Lancashire Distress: whether they think that similar calamities can best be dealt with in all respects as the cotton famine has been; or whether, warned by experience, we may not in future find a more excellent way. You naturally rejoice that so great a peril to public credit and the public peace, and to the lives of half a million of people;



should have passed over without any catastrophe, and with comparatively little suffering; and I have purposely delayed the utterance of a regretful word, until you have had time to enjoy abundantly the felicitations that ever wait upon good fortune. But ere now, you have failed not in sunny days to urge the duty of guarding against recurring storms. When corn was cheap and the country prosperous in 1844 and 1845, you persisted in reminding Parliament that a time might come again when food would be scarce and employment slack: and you have now your reward in the grateful acknowledgment of all men, that the Government, the Legislature, and the respectable indolence of good society at that time were wrong, and that the Anti-Corn-Law League was right, in keeping up its importunate cry for an altered law. You will pardon me, therefore, if I venture briefly and succinctly to recal the leading events of the last three years in Lancashire, as far as they serve to illustrate the question I would raise.

Signal calamities have often proved, in the life of a nation as in that of an individual, the source of


deep instruction and of lasting good. It is not always permitted us indeed to recognise such consequences of affliction; but it is certain that we might more frequently do so, did we but earnestly try. While suffering lasts, our duty is to see how we can best relieve it; but another and not less imperative duty begins when it ceases to exist. The *post-mortem* examination of misery is not always pleasant; but upon the conscience of a wise people it is always obligatory. How else shall we utilize example? How else, when the same or like evils recur, shall we be better prepared to deal with them? Political thoughtlessness is too apt to turn away from the performance of such a duty, with the lazy and superficial excuse that, bad as the case may have been, it was altogether exceptional; and that as it was not foreseen, it need not be kept in remembrance. The good-nature of a busy community accepts the plausible suggestion, too often, without an inquiry whether it be just or wise; and lessons of great pith and moment for the time to come remain unlearnt. Evils in their nature so exceptional that their repetition need not be feared or guarded

against, are indeed very rare, although less rare perhaps, than it suits *poco curante* rule to acknowledge. To admit that the same sort of thing, however unusual, may occur again, raises irresistibly the presumption that something of the same kind had occurred before, though legislative unpreparedness does not like to own the fact, and trusts to popular forgetfulness for its exoneration. Hence the loud iteration on every occasion of exigency, that "the circumstances are altogether exceptional," the practical meaning of which is neither more or less than this—that nobody is to be held accountable for any amount of blundering or breaking down that may occur.


The suspension of the Cotton Manufacture, which during the last three years has caused so much loss and suffering to the inhabitants of Lancashire, has constantly been spoken of in this way. Happening simultaneously with the cessation of the ordinary supply of the raw material from America, it was set down, not unnaturally perhaps, as arising entirely from that cause; and as the blockade of Charleston, Mobile,

and New Orleans by the Federal Government, and the interdict by the Confederate Government of the export of cotton wool by land, were events equally unexampled and unlooked-for, many were willing to accept the inference that these, and these alone, occasioned the paralysis of our most notable branch of trade: and then, as nobody here had had ought to do with the causes of the great Civil War, so nobody could fairly be held accountable for the consequences these might entail, or for the want of preparation to meet them.

When we look more carefully however into the history of the matter, its features assume a very different aspect. In depth and prevalence, the distress of 1862 was no doubt exceptional; and so were some of its aggravating causes. But it is as certain as any fact in the chronicles of industry, that the stoppage of the cotton mills did not begin with the blockade, and that to a vast extent it would have taken place had the political unity of America never been broken. Nay more, it is as certain as any other result in simple arithmetic, that to a large class of capitalists in Lancashire, the sudden closing of the



American ports proved an inestimable benefit, doubling as it did the value of their heavy stocks on hand, which, owing to the overloaded state of the foreign markets, must have otherwise become ruinously depreciated. A long course of speculative production had, in 1861, reached its limit, and multitudes must have been thrown out of employment in consequence, though Abraham Lincoln never had been elected President of the United States, and though the word "Secession" never had been spoken. Gluts there had been before in the cotton trade, general and grievous. The din of the engine-room had often previously been hushed; the fire on the weaver's hearth had often been consequently quenched, and the school penny of the operative's child had frequently before remained for months unpaid. It is mere delusion to believe—mere deception to pretend the contrary. The Cotton Famine of 1861—1863 was wider in its scope and more perilous in its character than the famine among the cotton hands of 1842 or 1857, partly because their numbers have prodigiously increased in the interim, and partly no doubt, because



for particular kinds of fabric, the raw material had become too scarce and dear. But independently of these incidents, a general cessation of spinning and weaving had become inevitable; and the fact was known to the Executive and the Legislature, or ought to have been known. If past experience then be good for anything, it ought to have foreshown how the exigency was to be met. If the ordinary Poor Law was not likely to prove sufficient, or if its provisions were upon high grounds of state policy considered inapplicable, then comprehensive measures of some other kind ought to have been prepared betimes, and held in readiness to be applied, before the spirit of popular energy and thrift had been let down. If it was undesirable, or as some would have said unsafe, to tell scores of thousands of intelligent and industrious men, accustomed to thirty or forty shillings a week wages, that they must seek food as paupers or starve, then it was an imperative duty to take thought beforehand how otherwise these men were to be fed. Nobody indeed could tell how long the exigency might last: and nobody ought to be blamed

for lack of second-sight. But those who are responsible for the peace and order of society, are responsible for not doing soon enough to be really useful, instead of doing so late as to be comparatively useless, what sooner or later has to be done. When a fever menaces a populous district, the duty of a Board of Health is, not to sit hoping that after a few deaths it may gradually disappear without medical interposition, but to provide promptly the means of succouring many sick, in the manner most likely to save their lives. Should the malady cease of itself, medicaments will be sparingly used ; and bedding and clothing and wine will keep for another time. But to let contagion spread, and the strength of the strong man be wasted, and the cheek of the mother grow wan, and the eye of the child grow dim, before any comprehensive scheme of help is even devised ; to neglect all anticipative care, and to defer all efficient aid until spontaneous pity has stepped in and done the work, and then, when the worst is over, to adopt a system of relief which "had it been earlier had been kind,"—this is not political wisdom ; this is a signal failure by

those who bear rule, in the duty they owe to the community at large.

When I speak of those who bear rule, and upon whom in such matters this serious responsibility rests, I am far from wishing to point invidiously at a few persons engaged in the Administration ; neither do I pretend to possess the departmental knowledge requisite to apportion nicely, degrees of blame between official chiefs and subordinates. What is called the Government in this country is becoming daily more and more the exponent of the will of the all-powerful classes who really govern, and is daily less able to withstand or to outrun the humour of the hour. In Parliament their ascendancy is complete ; and until their conviction is strongly developed in favour of a change in any branch of our laws, such change is practically impossible. There are occasions doubtless, when the process of conviction is quickened by the inscrutable power of public opinion ; but for the most part its influence is rather atmospheric than specifically impulsive, and ministers, whatever they may desire, must await the pressure, without which they

can seldom move. They can indeed startle apathetic content from its day-dream by timely warnings and by the disclosure of early information on subjects of moment; they can institute inquiries without waiting for preliminary leave, and lay upon the table specimens of dangerous facts, with suggestions for the best mode of dealing with them. In due course these have their effect, and when the case is one that admits of patient waiting, the wary originator of useful change may, without risking his official position, feel that he is aiding in its accomplishment. It is otherwise however when evil comes suddenly, and there is no time for opinion, whether of the governing few or the governed many, to ripen by slow degrees.

While correcting the error which ascribed the Distress of Lancashire to the Civil War in America as its primary and principal cause, it cannot be denied that the dearth of cotton consequent thereon, proved a great aggravation of the evil. On the 29th of April, 1861, President Lincoln issued a proclamation, declaring the ports of the Seceding States subject to a strict blockade. It was said at the time, by many that

high prices in Europe would nevertheless draw large supplies of cotton wool from Carolina and Mississippi. It was argued that the blockade would be extensively evaded, and that by means of inland navigation and railways, the raw material of manufacture would find its way through the Northern States. And so perhaps to some extent it might have done, had not public opinion in the South been contrary. The Confederate Congress passed an act prohibiting, under the strictest penalties, the export of cotton wool, except by sea, from and after the 1st of June; and with few and inconsiderable exceptions, this interdict was obeyed. Meanwhile on the 13th of May, the Queen issued a proclamation commanding the observance of a rigid neutrality between the belligerents; and a few days later the Emperor of the French followed Her Majesty's example. An end was thus absolutely put by public and solemn inhibition, to commerce with the Southern States; and the price of raw cotton in the Liverpool market rapidly rose from sixpence a pound to two shillings—a price which, even though subsequent speculation had not caused men

to look upon as comparatively moderate, would have placed an insuperable obstacle in the way of remunerative production, in all those branches of the manufacture where the cost of the raw material enters largely into that of the fabric when complete.

By the end of autumn, short time had become the rule instead of the exception in the mills that still kept going; and of these the number had in many places greatly diminished. Advices from the East became little more than brief confirmations of the fact, already too notorious, that every market there was overstocked, and that to send out fresh consignments would be but to entail additional loss. From the West, promises of peace had wholly died away. Every hour the government and the people of the Federal States seemed to grow more resolute in their determination to enforce the maintenance of the Union, at any cost or hazard, and to resent the expression of any doubt as to their ability to do so. Speeches and journals throughout the Northern States were full of angry reproaches against England, for having acknowledged the belligerent rights of the

South. From the Seceding States there came simultaneously passionate assurances, that sooner than allow the cotton crop of 1861 to find its way to Europe, every particle of it would be given to the flames, unless the independence of the Confederacy were meantime acknowledged. By France it was generally understood this would be done, were England prepared to take concerted action with her in the matter; and there were some who imagined, after the battle of Bull's Run, that a joint interposition of the two Powers was not impossible. We now know that the suggestion was made in point of fact at a very early period by the French Emperor; and it formed confessedly one of the most serious subjects of consideration when the Cabinet re-assembled in November. The majority were for letting things take their course. No secret was made of the resolution thus arrived at; and the industry of Lancashire was compelled to feel that there was nothing for it, but to wrap round its stiffening limbs the mantle its thrift had woven for a time of need, and to pray that the winter of unwilling idleness might not be long. It

is impossible to praise too highly the mute and tranquil courage with which the factory population seemed to make up their minds from the first, to endure loyally and uncomplainingly the hard fate that had befallen them. A grudging spirit can alone prompt the question—What could they have gained by turbulence or agitation? A full-fed community threatened with actual want, and left uninterrupted leisure to listen to all manner of sanguine and exciting suggestions for obviating it, has not very often in the world's history been found proof against temptation; and when we look back on the encouragement given in our own day to pressure from without, by the pusillanimity of successive Administrations, and recollect that nearly all the great legislative changes we have witnessed have been excused and defended specifically on the ground that they were conceded only to popular intimidation, the Lancashire operatives might well have been pardoned for believing that, did they only make themselves sufficiently troublesome, Lord Palmerston would not have scrupled to disallow the blockade of the Southern Ports, and to

recognise the Southern Confederacy. Whatever may have been the motives that restrained them from giving way to clamour, or entering into political combination, it is enough for us to recall, with feelings of satisfaction, the self-denying conduct of the working men of Lancashire in the face of circumstances inexpressibly trying.

Having come to the determination that neutrality was to be observed in the American quarrel, and being presumably aware of the actual condition of the export trade to the East, it became the paramount duty of Government to provide betimes in all possible ways for the alleviation of the coming evil. As guardians of the public peace, they must have been naturally anxious to insure its preservation; and as public men, many of whom were in the habit of laying high claims to the character of philanthropists and something more, they could not be supposed capable of indolently sitting by, while desolation and ruin gradually welled up in one devoted region beneath their eyes, without making some attempt, or preparing at least to make some attempt, to rescue the doomed.

The question, on the solution of which a wise policy in all such cases ought to depend, is manifestly—whether the impending distress is likely to be but a brief and partial aggravation of ordinary suffering, or whether it is in its nature and extent likely to be characterized by the features of exceptional calamity? Rashness and arrogance would alone pretend to lay down inflexible rules for the determination of such a question. Manifestly, it may often be one most difficult to determine; confessedly it requires the possession of the best information, and the exercise of the clearest judgment. In 1847 many humane persons in Lancashire, yielding to the contagion of fear, arising from the prevalence of dearth and pestilence elsewhere, were ready to invoke the aid of public charity, and to declare the permanent Poor Law inadequate to meet the pressure of the hour. Luckily for Lancashire, its counsels were then guided by a man, the just balance of whose mind was not to be disturbed by casual or passing incidents, and whose calm and resolute temperament enabled him to still the impatience and to restrain the vehemence of men

whose humanity would have impelled them to do great harm, without intending it, to the working classes. Mr. Alfred Austin had been for some time the Poor Law Inspector for the district, and knew its condition well. Without being a pedant or a tapeist, he felt it to be his duty to stick to the ship even in rough weather, and to forbid the launch of a boat so long as it was possible to keep her head to the wind. He had the rare gift of being able to infuse his own spirit of courage and constancy into others; and happily he had about him men not wanting themselves in those high qualities. The Mayor of Manchester, pressed on all sides to initiate a public subscription for the relief of distress, had called a meeting for the purpose; but before the appointed hour he was waited on by Mr. Rickards, the Chairman of the Board of Guardians, and by Mr. Austin, who argued that the step was unnecessary, or at least premature. They pointed out the difficulties and objections inherent in every mixed system of legal and eleemosynary relief. If a large fund were raised by subscription, it must be necessarily confided to irrespon-

sible persons, liable, from their imperfect knowledge of applicants, to be greatly imposed upon. This objection ought not indeed to prevail where the resources from rates were likely to prove insufficient ; but where they were adequate, the duty of the Guardians was to see that all who possessed rateable property shared the burthen, instead of acquiescing in its being unequally cast upon the generous and humane. The arguments against it were so cogently and convincingly urged, that the meeting was deferred for the time, and was never afterwards convened. An extra rate was imposed and levied without difficulty. A generous discrimination was shown in the dispensation of relief; imposture was kept at bay; the law in its general integrity was maintained; and when the temporary pressure subsided, Lancashire had the satisfaction of reflecting that she was still self-dependent, and that her property had, without the intervention of any new law, contributed all that was just and necessary to the support of her poor.

Was the state of things in the winter of 1861 analogous to that in 1848 ?


The Poor Law Board was not wanting in diligence to obtain prompt and accurate information regarding the impending distress. The Circular of the 11th of November, cautiously worded, with an evident desire to avoid betraying alarm or giving rise to demoralizing expectations of Treasury aid, invited the Guardians of each Union over which the cold shadow of industrial death was stealing, to say frankly what they were doing, what they could do, and what they would have had done for them.

“ No. 7.

“ *Distress in the Cotton Districts.—Letter from the
“ Poor Law Board to the Guardians of Unions.*

“ Poor Law Board, Whitehall,
17th Nov., 1861.

“ GENTLEMEN,—The Poor Law Board have directed me to inform you, that they view with some apprehension the effects which may ensue in the manufacturing districts, from the stagnation in the Cotton Trade; and that they are at present considering the manner in which any unusual amount of distress may be most effectively provided for.



"The Board have no difficulty in assuring themselves that the Guardians of the Poor will be enabled; through their own experience, their habits of business, and their knowledge of the law, to meet any pressure which may result from a depression of trade; and the Board are also confident that the machinery of the law itself will, with judicious management, be found, as heretofore, equal to any emergency.

"It is, however, the duty of the Board to notice the efforts of the Guardians of the Poor, and if possible, by virtue of their authority, to aid them in difficulties in which by means of circumstances of unusual occurrence they may be involved.

"I am directed, therefore, to request you will have the goodness to furnish the Board with a report of the present position and prospects of your district, in order that they may be accurately informed as to your own views, and also as to the condition of the class more immediately affected by any displacement of the ordinary employment of the district.

"I am, &c.,

"C. P. VILLIERS.

"To the Guardians of the Poor of
the Union."*

* Fourteenth Ann. Rep. Poor Law Board, Ap., p. 27.


If the Poor Law could have been relied on to meet the impending emergency, with the aid of such exceptional measures as would have harmonized with its expanded but unspoilt working, then we should have expected to find such auxiliary measures promptly adopted by Parliament. But reading the sad story of the last three years backwards, we look in vain for the development of any such policy at the period in question. The Guardians were indeed invited to acquaint the authorities at Whitehall with the "condition of the class more immediately affected by any displacement of the ordinary employment of the district," and with their own views respecting them. The replies of the various Boards, it is well known, were sufficiently copious and precise. They pointed out what was to be apprehended when the savings of the working people should be exhausted, and when, in spite of their noble spirit of self-respect, they should be left no alternative but that provided ordinarily for thriftless pauperism. There was still time to prepare and to provide. The enemy was at the gate, but he had not yet broken in: a diversion well planned and executed might go far to relieve the city. Some

augmentation of rates was everywhere observable, but it was comparatively slight; and unfortunately nothing was done to prevent it suddenly becoming great and overwhelming. The tale told by the *Guardians* was verified in a thousand forms in private correspondence and in the columns of the public journals. In the calmness of the gloom that prevailed, the approach of the danger was as clearly described as foreseen; but nothing was done, and Lancashire was permitted to drift without help to the brink of famine, as England had been suffered, not long before, to drift into war.

Parliament was not summoned to meet earlier than usual. When it did assemble, questions were asked tending to elicit explanations of the Ministerial policy regarding the American Blockade; and anxiety was expressed from time to time, in a great variety of ways, respecting the industrial and social condition of Lancashire. But beyond the reiteration of the resolve not to interfere in the Civil War, no declaration of any importance was made. It could not be denied that the Cotton Manufacture had almost

ceased, and that the speculative prices at which the raw material was selling at Liverpool precluded the hope of its early revival. Nevertheless so long as the Poor Rates remained low, there was, it was said, no proof of general suffering, and it would be time enough to think of legislative interposition when the evil day actually came. Gleaning the scattered truth as we can from the wide field of statistical returns, we find that the Poor Law expenditure in thirty Unions of Lancashire and Cheshire, containing a population of 2,609,951, for the half-year ending Michaelmas, 1861, was 217,944*l.*, while in the next half-year ending Lady-Day, 1862, it had increased only to 272,616*l.*, or about one-fourth. Upon rateable property valued at 7,973,944*l.*, the average burden had thus only risen in the first six months of popular suffering, from sixpence halfpenny to eightpence farthing in the pound;* and examined through the powerful lens specially provided for the purpose at Gwyder House,


* Cost of Relief, &c. Returns, No. 501, 1862, and No. 99, 1863, presented to the House of Commons.



the fact appeared to cause little legislative uneasiness, and suggested no thought of legislative action. Ministers of religion might importunately plead for help on behalf of their flocks, whom they knew to be sinking day by day into the abyss of want, and journalists might vehemently declaim about the necessity of remedial measures being taken in time ; but Parliament knew better than to suffer itself to be moved by unphilosophic talk. There was the arithmetic—an infallible test of justice and mercy, expediency and principle ; and arithmetic, it was said with a sneer, told a somewhat different tale.

The total inaction thus displayed illustrated but too literally Mr. Carlyle's whimsical definition of "government by blind-man's buff." Too plainly conscious of danger nigh at hand, yet anxious to avoid knocking or jostling against it knew not what, the Executive seemed condemned to stand in the midst, motionless and irresolute, waiting to be fairly caught, before pulling the bandage from its eyes. The people were left week after week to consume their humble savings, and to exhaust every

expedient that mutual help and silent self-denial could suggest, before resorting to public charity. We can understand the logic of those who contend that, in the inexorable application of a great economic rule, this was as it should be,—a legitimate interval of sad but necessary preparation for the demand and the concession of wholesale relief out of Poor Rates. It is not necessary to discuss the humanity or policy of such a view; what one is tempted to ask is—Was this the view really entertained, and was it consistently acted on? If so, Parliament would have had to plead faith at least in their own philosophy; and had the system broken down in detail, it would at least have been something to have been able to say that it was the peculiarity of circumstances, not the weakness of the principle, that had baffled them. It is too plain, from what subsequently took place, that policy or plan they had none; that so long as the unfortunate operatives would continue mutely to endure their privations, the leaders of parliamentary parties were content to take a little more legislative sleep, and a little more legislative slumber, and




to enjoy a little more folding of legislative hands to sleep. What was to come afterwards they knew not, and for aught that appeared to the contrary, they seemed not curious to see. Towards the end of March, 1862, however, the outer public mind began to evince symptoms of disquietude and discontent. Vague apprehensions prevailed as to the extent of the impending evil. Lancashire had so long been thought of only as the seat of the Cotton Manufacture, and the expansion of that branch of industry had been so rapid and so great, that in the popular imagination its sudden and absolute cessation seemed to be, not merely synonymous with general starvation in that devoted region, but to be like "stopping the fly-wheel of national prosperity,"* by which the whole industry of the country would be put out of gear.

In the House of Commons, on the 9th of May, in reply to appeals for aid from the Government, it was stated that the distress in Lancashire was rather declining; but that even though it should further increase, the resources of the Poor Law would be

* Speech of Mr. Cobden, 24th July, 1862.

found ample to meet it. Mr. Bright strongly deprecated the idea of extraneous aid, and stated his conviction that the manufacturing districts, if duly enabled to provide for their own wants, needed and expected no help for the purpose. Looking back at all that has since occurred, this seems to have been undoubtedly true; and those who take the highest pride in the industrial pre-eminence of Lancashire, feel the deepest regret that she was not so enabled to maintain herself. Far greater funds than those obtained in charity, might have been easily raised on the credit of the rates, and provision made for their re-payment by annual instalments, without imposing any oppressive burthen on the community. Unhappily this was not done. Lancashire still revolted from the humiliation of having her name associated with that of public mendicancy: and for some weeks longer, her people were left to struggle on as best they might with their difficulties. Parliament listened curiously to details of privation and suffering, but its leaders had no policy to propose, and no legislative emollients were offered.

It is but due to the Manchester Board of Guardians, to observe how sincerely they evinced throughout, a desire to keep in view as far as possible, the fixed principles of the law of relief; and how readily they assumed the responsibility, regardless of what was passing around them, of providing directly, and by means of increased rates, for the increase of local burthens. Several of the most experienced of their number were of opinion, that without voluntary aid, the whole of the distress in Manchester might have been relieved through the agency of the Poor Law, as it had been on former occasions of unusual pressure. And adhering to this opinion, they point to the significant fact that on the 1st of March, 1864, a balance of 40,000*l.* remained to the credit of the Union out of unexpended rates. But when national free gifts dropped manna-like, on the rich centre of the manufacturing region, as well as on its furthest and most forlorn confines; and when all distinction between mill hands and ordinary paupers was elsewhere thrown aside, it would have been doubtless very difficult to enforce the observance



of that distinction in a single Union. Early and unremitting care was taken, however, to provide outdoor work for the male adults who sought relief, and it is needless to say, with results in all respects satisfactory. These as well as many other benefits are in great degree attributable to the indefatigable diligence and steadfastness in enlightened purpose of Mr. Rickards, for many years Chairman of the Board. It ought indeed to be borne in mind, that Manchester cannot be taken as a fair specimen of the surrounding districts. The organic structure of the heart does not resemble that of the extremities. It is confessedly peculiar in many respects; and in none more than this, that Manchester can hardly be said to be a cotton-spinning or cotton-weaving town in the sense that Blackburn, Stockport, or Ashton is so describable. Manchester has many other great and flourishing branches of industry beside, most of which retained an unabated activity during the whole of the cotton famine.

On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that if Manchester has not so large a proportion of

operatives, it has a much larger proportion of a class that is more difficult to deal with—the very lowest of the population, who when unusual distress is felt, either rise or are driven to the surface, and who are far more troublesome and dangerous than a larger number of skilled hands of any description would be. Taking these considerations into account, it is fairly open to question whether, if Manchester could have met the crisis, other Unions might not have done so too. I do not shrink from saying frankly, that my own impression is the other way; and even if it could be shown to demonstration, that all the factory hands might have been carefully fed and comfortably clothed, during the suspension of mill-work, as paupers, that was not the method of relief which ought to have been preferred. Its superiority to all others in uniformity, discipline, and the prevention of fraud hardly admits of dispute: but there is something else to be considered, that, fairly set in the balance of social benefits, may well be thought to outweigh even these great considerations. Morally and industrially, it is a sad, nay, even a terrible thing, to

tell a sober, intelligent, laborious, and orderly community, who have hitherto decently paid their way, kept house with modest hospitality, and brought up children in habits of industry and thrift,—that from and after a given day they and their little ones shall be flung down from the level on which they have dwelt, into the bare cold yard of destitution, there to be classed with the depraved, the idle, and the incorrigible; with tramps, and thieves, and strumpets, and all whom the law classes under the general name of vagabonds, of every degree; and all this for no fault of their own, nor from the lack of any forethought of theirs, whereby individually or collectively, they could have averted their sudden destitution for a day. To me it seems, I own, that such a sacrifice is one which society ought not to require,—that the humiliating condition precedent of relief is one which, putting aside all questions of abstract justice, it is not wise or expedient that society should impose. And what I deplore, in looking back through the annals of the last three years, is chiefly this—that while the old system of Relief out of Rates was disfavoured and almost


denounced as inhumane and inopportune—whereby the benefits of order and economy were lost—the best men were nevertheless subjected to the humiliation of having to apply for aid in pauper guise, and to accept of pauper fare.

Early in May, it was resolved to send down Mr. H. B. Farnall, with special instructions to inquire into the actual condition of things, and to take superintending charge of the administration of relief. To have thus practically superseded for the time being those who had hitherto merited official confidence would have been an unaccountable exercise of power, had no change of system been contemplated. The letter of instructions addressed to Mr. Farnall, was couched indeed in terms sufficiently wide to warrant this supposition; and the earlier revelations made by him, left on the minds of the most experienced in Poor Law administration, little doubt that some purpose of the kind was entertained, although when questioned as to its scope and drift he did not always succeed in explaining its limits or conditions. He was to “interpret and define to those persons who


might solicit his assistance, the true spirit and breadth of the Poor Law, and at the same time to promote that prudent economy and circumspection which should at all times systematically regulate the distribution of charitable funds." He was to "create and sustain such a harmony of liberal and judicious action between Voluntary Committees and Boards of Guardians, as should be calculated to secure for those who were in extreme necessity prompt and sufficient relief, upon the true principles of the Poor Law, which were, it was believed, fully adequate to meet all probable emergencies, and competent, when properly apprehended and administered, to advance and protect the best interests of the community."*

When the public learned that a Special Commissioner had been sent down to inquire and report, and to direct generally the administration of relief, no little curiosity was awakened throughout all classes of the community. Guardians and Committee-men prepared to show him what they were doing, to ask his advice,

* Letter of Instructions from the President of Poor Law Board to H. B. Farnall, Esq., 12th May, 1862.



and to hear what help, if any, he had to offer in case of need. Uniformity of practice was on all hands felt to be most desirable. Such practice, to be permanently maintainable, must be founded on broad and definite principles, consonant with the spirit of the law, and tested by the wisdom of experience. If deviations from the ordinary rule of relief were to be made, their limits ought to be plainly pointed out, and the reasons of them explained. The rigour justifiable as a check on individual idleness and unthrift in prosperous times, might not be applicable to universal want of employment suddenly arising from causes which none could have foreseen or obviated. On the other hand, vague expectations that subsistence would be provided one way or other for all who lacked the usual means of livelihood, were to be deprecated, alike for the sake of the ratepayers and of the labouring poor. Most people expected that after eight-and-twenty years of central superintendence over the varied Unions and parishes of England and Wales, the Poor Law Department would be able to give, with clearness and precision, the tone to all who were



engaged in the work of local relief. They were embarking in a great and arduous struggle with popular misery; they required all the unity of purpose and uniformity of discipline which confidence in an impartial and intelligent Executive can alone impart; and they waited as one man for the utterance of the key-note that should secure their unison, and the regularity of their forward march. But "if the trumpet utter an uncertain sound, who shall gird himself for the battle?" Listening generosity, zeal, and care, waited anxiously to hear from one who spoke as having authority; but what they heard tended only to create contrary impressions amongst them, to beget controversies as to what was and what was not to be done, to fill some with exultation and others with dismay. Mr. Farnall's first public address was delivered to the Preston Board of Guardians, on the 20th of May. The facts and figures affecting the locality were elaborately set forth therein, mingled with a variety of statements more or less important, the result of personal inquiry. Much praise was bestowed on the Guardians and Relief

Committees, for the endeavours they had made to combine frugality with justice, and care for the deserving with discouragement of the idle ; yet in the same breath, the broadest hints were thrown out that the relief given was not adequate to keep the people in health ; and that it was not only no part of the duty of Guardians to ascertain how much an applicant had received as wages for casual work, or as charity from benevolent bodies or individuals, but that it was the duty of the Board *not* to inquire into these circumstances. On being told that as regarded the mill-hands this had not been done, Mr. Farnall observed,—“ We must be quite satisfied that that is the state of the case, and that no such inquiry is ever made or ever will be made.”* Labour in return for public relief ought indeed to be exacted, he said, from the able-bodied ; but it ought to be of a kind suitable to their previous habits. Delicate hands ought not to be blistered by unaccustomed work, like the use of the stonebreaker's hammer ; and in rainy weather, it was not right that the men should be compelled to

* *Times* Report, 22nd May, 1862.

walk a mile and a half at a particular hour to answer to their names. The uncomplaining temper of the people who had been set on out-door work was highly praised by Mr. Farnall; but by way of unsettling them in this thankful disposition, the Guardians were publicly reprov'd for not treating them better, and admonish'd that they must be more humane henceforth in what they set them to do. Some persons imagin'd that, before ventilating such opinions in the name of the Poor Law Board, measures had been matur'd by Government for facilitating public works of an exceptional character, on which the mill-hands might be fitly employ'd; for with every desire to find out-door occupation of a useful kind, it had already begun to perplex the local authorities at Preston and elsewhere, how the daily increasing numbers were to be regularly occupi'd, so that all of them might do even a little. But of legislative aid the Special Commissioner had nought to tell. Parliament was sitting, and was not overburdened with business. The summer was still young, and according to the concurrent testimony of a cloud of

competent witnesses, infinite benefits might have been rendered to the manufacturing towns and their inhabitants, had suitable facilities been given for draining and road-making, excavating reservoirs, and enclosing waste grounds. But nothing of the sort was held out in prospect, for nothing of the sort was yet in contemplation.

In Preston, 22,000 men, women, and children had been thrown out of bread by the stoppage of the factories. They had during the spring drawn above 17,000*l.* out of the savings' banks, with more than 700*l.* from trades' societies; and they had disposed of many articles of modest luxury and household comfort rather than ask for public aid. But these resources were spent, and now they must come upon the Rates or look to subscription-funds for assistance. "You see, therefore," said the Commissioner, "the class of people with whom you have to deal. You should, and I believe you will, have the greatest respect for these poor people, when you find that they are exhausting all their own means before they think of applying for your charity."* Soft words cost little;

* *Times* Report, 22nd May, 1862.

they humour a starving crowd, and in hunger's dreams invest the utterer with angel's wings. To elude difficulties for the time being, and to popularize him who has to speak in the name of the law, smooth flattery and glib sympathy is an excellent receipt. But what is the value of professions of respect for brave and silent suffering, if it instigate no better method of relief than the blind and blundering one, of first pauperizing indiscriminately the whole of a necessitous community, and then, by way of assuagement, blunting and breaking down the established fences of the law? If it was really necessary to compel all the cotton-spinners out of work to write themselves down as common paupers, then it was cruelty rather than humanity to make an exciting speech they were all sure to read, proving that they did not deserve their fate. If it was unnecessary that they should be so treated, then these people ought to have been told to look to the Relief Committee, not the Guardians; and the Relief Committee ought to have been shown how they might best ascertain, by house-to-house visitation, who were fit objects for their bounty; and instead of tampering with the fixed rules of legal relief, encouragement

ought to have been given to maintain those rules with a special view to economy, at a time when the smaller ratepayers were losing their usual customers, and beginning to tremble for themselves. But if the object was to raise a cloud of worse than idle talk, and to make the poor believe that Gwyder House was more their friend than the Preston Board of Guardians, then the speech was admirable for its purpose.


The Guardians had of their own accord resolved to make a three-shilling rate, whereby they calculated upon obtaining a sum of 28,000*l.*; and Mr. Farnall declared his opinion that this sum, with the unspent balance of 2330*l.* subscriptions in hand, and the further contributions that might be expected from opulent persons within the Union, would fully meet all the requirements of the remaining seven months of the year. By way of helping the subscription-list, he proceeded to upbraid in no measured terms rich men who, hard of heart, had not yet contributed; and he pointed to one wealthy individual in particular, who had made his money by the labour of the Preston people, and who nevertheless gave nothing, he said, towards succouring them in their need. From the

pulpit it might be well, after the manner of Latimer, thus to lash the laggard rich on the uphill path of charity. But it was not to preach in workhouse board-rooms on the practice of virtue, that inspectors were appointed under 4th and 5th William IV., c. 76, which enabled Government to constitute a sub-department of the State, with power to make rules and orders regulating the support of the poor out of rates, falling indiscriminately on the evil and the good, the just and the unjust. It never entered into the mind of Parliament when enacting that law, that its rigour was to be tempered with official epigrams on the deceitfulness of riches, or official coaxings and wheedlings of those in want.

There are those who believed in May, 1862, and who believe still, that had the Guardians of Lancashire and Cheshire been encouraged to grapple boldly, as they were very well inclined to do at the outset, with the exigency, and had they been enabled, by a timely measure of legislative aid, to borrow on the credit of future rates the extraordinary sums that they might require, they would have been able to have tided the people over their shallows,

as their predecessors had done before. There were confessedly objections to this plan, as there were to every other that could be named ; but it had about it the great recommendation of maintaining unlowered the high spirit of self-dependence in which that great manufacturing region had long taken justly so much pride ; and it would have had in it the merit of convincing the people, that there was a law capable of providing, under every emergency, that they should live and not die. There were many who thought that these advantages would be too dearly bought if the great mass of the factory hands must thereby be treated as paupers ; and for the sake of avoiding this alternative, they were ready to give their time and their money self-denyingly to voluntary associations for the purposes of extra-legal relief, and even to solicit contributive aid from afar. The course indicated by the Government Inspector at Preston unhappily combined the objectionable features of both schemes, and sentenced to extinction the high-minded hopes of each in turn. From the day of his opening speech at Preston, every Board of Guardians felt that

their defensive position against waste had been turned. Instead of being sustained and strengthened in the discharge of their onerous duties, they were told in the hearing of the people, that economy was not to be the order of the day. Instead of keeping relief apart from wages, and distinct from grants from charitable funds, they were told that the best thing to do was to jumble all together. Instead of being fortified in the faith they had learned from Mr. Assistant-Commissioner Austin, that an adequate amount of labour should be required of every able-bodied man who was relieved, mutiny was officially preached to those who had been set to unproductive work, while no new mode of employment more useful or agreeable was pointed out or provided. And what was the result? Why, that within the space of two months, meetings were held in the Metropolis, to organize a national subscription to save from starvation a sixth part of the inhabitants of the most enterprising and opulent district in the realm. Thus appealed to, the nation nobly did its duty, and the Cotton hands of Lancashire were saved.



But praise of a life-boat's crew is not incompatible with blame of bad seamanship in the early hours of danger. The exact counterpart of what has lately occurred may never occur again ; but it were rank folly and fatuity to believe that, this particular peril passed, others of magnitude do not await us. Year by year, as our foreign trade expands, we become necessarily more and more susceptible to the influence of circumstances beyond our control ; and large bodies of our people will more than ever be liable to suffer from interruptions of employment, which it would be utter waste of time in them to attempt to forecast or to forefend. The same sort of evil that national munificence has rendered comparatively light in Lancashire, is morally certain to recur there and elsewhere ; and we have no right to leave the provision for meeting it to chance or the popular mood of the day. It is from this point of view that an inquiry into what was done and what was left undone during the cotton famine may prove instructive : it is in this view, and this view only, that the present observations are made.

In the previous year, Mr. Farnall had held very different language elsewhere. The winter of 1860-61, it may be remembered, was one of unusual severity. Great distress in consequence prevailed in the poorer districts of the Metropolis. The labourers in the docks, and in the market-gardens of the suburbs, were thrown out of employment by the intense frost, which lasted with hardly any intermission for upwards of five weeks. Applications for relief to Boards of Guardians became urgent from persons of all ages; and Mr. Farnall, as Inspector for the Metropolitan district, recommended that the alternative test of the work-house or the stoneyard should be offered to all adult males. Out of 15,463 men, 1003 accepted the former, and 4230 the latter: "there were only 5233 who accepted the test at all, and the rest were never heard of again."* Such was his own account of the matter, subsequently given in evidence before a Committee of the House of Commons, to whom he expressed his strong conviction that the Poor Law administration in London, far from breaking down at the period in

* Rep. of Select Com. on Poor Relief, 1864, p. 4.

question, would have been found amply sufficient for every legitimate want, without the aid of spontaneous charity. He could not have forgotten what he had said and done in Middlesex, in January, 1861, when called upon to make official suggestions in Lancashire, in May, 1862. Shall we be told that the inconsistency was not his, but that of his employers? My own belief is rather that the selection was an unhappy one, and that the man was not fitted for the time or for the place. It is one thing to steer safely, a boat not overladen, close to shore, where mistake as to headlands is impossible and shelter at any moment is at hand: it is another thing to take the command of a fleet in the worst of weather, without chart or beacon, in a sea of unknown troubles. The Special Commissioner seems to have been utterly at fault what course to take. Sometimes he affected to take one, and sometimes another, while practically he may be said to have taken none at all.

A few days later, Mr. Farnall addressed the Board of Guardians at Blackburn, in a speech designed likewise to explain the actual state of the Law of Relief,

and the special purpose for which he had been sent thither. He was instructed, he said, to impress upon them that "the amount and kind of relief was in their own hands. It was uncontrolled by any law or board, nor had any Government attempted to control it at all. . . . There was, he repeated, no limit to the amount of money which the Guardians might call upon the Overseers to pay." Of course such observations, when reported, had the effect of impressing the necessitous with the belief that the Guardians required to be thus lectured into liberality, and that the Government was their true friend and protector that would not see them starve. Yet when it is remembered that Government had literally done nothing to help the afflicted people through their difficulties, it may not be deemed too hard to say that such admonitions savoured strongly of a desire to reap where others had sown, and to levy contributions to popularity, at the expense of those who had no choice but silently to yield them. Language like this, in the face of an anxious and unemployed multitude, was simply to chuck the linch-pin out of the forewheel

of economy, leaving the bullied and bewildered conductors of local relief to get on as best they could amidst stimulated importunities and multiplied obstacles.

The Special Commissioner went on to inculcate the policy of identical methods of administering relief by Committees and Guardians. The line of distinction between different classes of persons in want was practically to be obliterated. He advised that a list of the persons relieved by the Board, with the amount given to each, should be sent to the Committee, that they might see what was given and act accordingly. If the object of transmitting such lists had been to apprise the Committee whom it was *not* necessary for them to relieve, nothing could have been more judicious. Just the reverse, however, was the way in which they were meant to be used, not only in Blackburn, but generally throughout the distressed districts. The Committees everywhere were induced to grant supplemental aid to those whose names they found on the Union lists; and instead of attempting to create a machinery of separate inspection and supervision,

these benevolent bodies suffered themselves to be persuaded that the best check they could have upon imposition and fraud, was to require of applicants the production of the relief tickets granted by the Guardians. Thus the two streams early commingled, and never afterwards became separable.

The *Times* could not contain its exultation at the public abandonment of the principles of Poor Law Relief, against which it had so long and vigorously contended. The enforcement of the workhouse test for the able-bodied, the inhibition of the allowance system, and the absolute dissociation of parochial relief from any and every species of aid in the form of private charity, had from the outset encountered in its columns the most strenuous opposition; and because the act of 1834 was avowedly based upon these, it was held up continually and consistently to popular reprobation. Rival journals, which supported the authors of the new Poor Law, complained of injustice and misrepresentation; and upon set days, in Parliament and at the hustings, the distinguished authors of that law denounced its censors as lending themselves blindly


to faction. Some relaxations in the system of administrative discipline had been indeed introduced ; but in the main its distinctive features were adhered to, and the practice throughout most of the agricultural districts of the kingdom was made conformable to the theory of altered legislation. In the manufacturing districts where wages were generally high, and the proportion of pauperism low, there were not the same motives on the part of the owners of property to invoke the repressive force of the new enactment ; but it might have been supposed that, whenever the circumstances of those regions threatened to become analogous to those above referred to, the same rules would nominally at least be applied. Well might the *Times* triumph over their complete and unconditional repudiation, and claim the Poor Law Board as converts to its economic creed. In a leading article, published on the 2nd of June, the proceedings at Preston and Blackburn were thus commented on :—

“ Mr. Farnall utterly disclaims on the part of the Central Board, any intention or wish to interfere with the amount of relief to be given, or with the relaxa-

tion of the Workhouse Test. He even calls in question more than one right, commonly attributed to the Poor Law Commissioners, and combats one by one all the so-called prejudices which obscure the true spirit and breadth of the Poor Law. . . . He strikes at the root of what is called the Labour Test, by disclaiming it as a means of discriminating between the idle and the deserving, . . . and pleads hard against the cruelty of spoiling the sensitive hands of artizans by hard labour. . . . So far from ignoring the efforts of the Local Relief Committees, he deals with them as if they were part of the Poor Law System. He advises the Guardians to furnish them with lists of persons in receipt of relief, and to ask no account of the expenditure in return. He all but names the wealthy mill-owners and merchants, who have not contributed to the Relief Fund according to their means. . . . He extols the Poor Law System in terms which its early admirers would scarcely have applied to it. It is elastic; it is humane; it is no iron rule; it aims at liberal and judicious action, in harmony with spontaneous benevolence. . . . A

veteran Poor Law Inspector, talking of a pauper's feelings, and openly appealing to motives that are either sentimental or next door to it—this indeed seems a greater innovation than the Poor Law [of 1834] itself was! And yet this is not the first time that the necessity of tempering strict rules with a merciful discretion has been indicated. Short as memories have become since the progress of events have become accelerated, there are some who will catch the burthen of a familiar strain in Mr. Farnall's comments on this part of our national duty to our neighbour. We have the best reason to remember these doctrines, for we advocated them when to do so was to incur the reproach of unscrupulous partizanship and obstructiveness. In the heyday of economical dogmatism, it was heresy to doubt the policy of inflexible general laws. Humanity was almost a term of abuse, for it was supposed that humane people must be blind to the evils of the allowance system, and in league with those who would make the Poor Rates public spoil. . . . In those days when distress was far more frequent and general than it is now, it was

of no avail to plead that calamity was unforeseen. . . . We congratulate the public on the practical solution of the conflict between abstract theory and the common dictates of humanity, which we now seem to have obtained. We cannot find fault with Mr. Villiers and his colleagues for borrowing our own views, and incorporating them into the creed of the Poor Law Board. It is fortunate for the Lancashire weavers that they reap the benefit of this conversion. . . . The *ruse* by which Mr. Farnall has rescued the Poor Law from disgrace, is quite in accordance with the practice of our Law Courts, where the judges, under the guise of declaring the law as it exists, are wont to throw out *dicta* that would very much astonish their predecessors, on whose authority they profess to rely. . . . He interprets the principle of the Poor Law in a way which, had it been invented thirty years ago, would have silenced the chief misgivings of objectors. The obnoxious features of that most sweeping measure are no longer to be distinguished. As we follow Mr. Farnall's sketch of the resources and prospects of Preston and



Blackburn, we sympathize with every word that we read ; but we cannot help asking ourselves, if this be so, where is the boasted uniformity of the Poor Law ?”

That Mr. Farnall spoke according to instructions was inferred, not only from the absence of any corrective statement from head-quarters, but from the increasingly lax and lavish tone adopted by him elsewhere, even in places not suffering any extraordinary depression. Wigan, whose prosperity had of recent years arisen from the development of its collieries quite as much as from the increase of its cotton mills, was still in a condition of comparative freedom from distress. At the beginning of June, 1862, the pauperism of the township little exceeded five per cent., and of the entire Union but four per cent. In 1851 the rateable property of the township had been valued at 53,568*l.*; since when it had risen to 72,854*l.*, and the total amount of expenditure in relief, up to the preceding Lady-day, was but 3315*l.* During the month of May, the numbers receiving parochial relief did not exceed 1930 individuals ; but taking the entire

number of mills which had recently been closed, or which were about to close, 13,600 persons were likely to be speedily involved in the general calamity. Mr. Farnall, under these circumstances, addressed the Board of Guardians on the 6th of June. One would have imagined that here, if anywhere, was a case justifying an appeal to the pride of recent prosperity, and to the spirit of self-help, in a community not yet borne down by the weight of taxation and the presence of misery and woe. The existing rates were confessedly insignificant; and a 2*s.* rate at Michaelmas was the utmost the Guardians need think of imposing to provide for the wants of the autumn. There could hardly be conceived a state of things presenting fewer available texts for a homily on the duty of prodigality and the convenience of looking to the nation at large for alms. Yet what were the topics on which Mr. Farnall thought fit rhetorically to dwell? He bade the Guardians remember that "parsimony was not economy;" that "they had better not inquire how much applicants received from charitable funds, and that they should rather

encourage the Relief Committee to supplement their grants out of rates." They might rest assured this policy would pay, because when it was known that rich people at Wigan had subscribed suitably to the relief of the local poor, if more money was wanted, the public at large would be ready generously to fill the void. "If, unfortunately, the period of trial should be prolonged, and the resources of Wigan should have done all that ought to be done; and they were able to say that charity had begun at home,—if it became known to the people of England that the benevolence of Wigan had been exhausted—there would be no difficulty in opening the gates of charity, and subscriptions would flow in."* Was ever the doctrine of universal mendicancy promulgated by official lips so undisguisedly before? Ere anything deserving the name of exceptional suffering had fallen upon Wigan, its people were encouraged to look to the nation at large for aid; and its local administrators were told to spend freely their light rates, *because* there was plenty of money to be had for

* *Times* Report, 10th June, 1862.

asking were the hat sent round. And what was the community thus addressed? One to whom the lines had fallen in such pleasant places, that in the ten previous years the rateable value of their property had increased thirty-six per cent.

What could a ratepayer of Norwich, with his permanent burthen of 5*s.* in the pound, or a ratepayer of Petworth, with his annual charge of 3*s.* 11*d.* in the pound, think of the reasonableness, the justice, the decency of a system, which left him unaided and unpitied to bear his unalleviated load of pauperism, while the specially favoured parishes of Lancashire were stimulated by highly-seasoned appeals to call upon the nation for assistance? Assistance to do what? To save their own pockets from the payment of high rates. Vague phrases about the locality first doing its duty, and about its charity being first exhausted, could blind no one. It would have been quite time enough to have talked of having done all that was possible after the attempt had been made. But the essence of the dependent policy here deliberately inculcated, consisted in the fact that a boundless perspective of

eleemosynary plenty was held forth to the eyes of Wigan, three months before it was even suggested that a 2*s.* rate should be imposed. Did the members of the Poor Law Board read the report of this extraordinary performance, as published at the time? If not, how is it that in a department constituted for the specific purpose of national supervision in the business of Poor Relief, the attention of its chiefs should not somehow have been called to the enunciation of principles, in their name, so utterly subversive of all inter-parochial equity? And if the members of the Board did read the report of Mr. Farnall's speech at the time, how did it happen that the rebuke they must have felt themselves called upon to administer, was conveyed in whispers so confidentially low, that their purport never reached the public ear?

On the 9th of June, we find Mr. Farnall again laying down the rule, that supplementary relief ought to be given by the Committees to those who had previously been assisted by the Guardians, the chief reason assigned being that, unless this were done, the shopkeepers would be unable to continue giving

credit to the working people. But how the condition of the shopkeepers was to be improved, by the same persons obtaining relief from two different funds, instead of each class of the distressed receiving aid from a separate source, does not very distinctly appear.

Things grew gradually worse ; yet Parliament did nothing to quicken the dormant powers of local relief into efficient action. It would be very unfair to cast upon the Poor Law Board the blame of this delay. I can easily understand the personal anxiety it must have entailed ; and how gladly you would have profited by any opportunity that seemed to present itself, for initiating measures in some sort of an anticipative nature, calculated to meet the emergency. It would naturally have been your pride, as head of the Department, to show special efficiency on so special an occasion ; and I cannot suppose that any of your colleagues in the Cabinet were unconscious that it would have been their interest, as well as their duty, to aid and support you in measures of the kind. But an Administration which subsists from day to day on

the forbearance of party antagonists, can seldom be expected to originate a policy which involves a material departure from the beaten track of rule : and it was your misfortune, at a time when originality of view and fearlessness of execution were alike requisite, to be unable to discover what Parliament would have you do, or whether they would have you do anything. The apathy of political unbelief lay heavy on men's souls ; and in a fog, the best seaman may be excused for laying-to. Something also must be set down to the peculiarities of your own position. The past services you had rendered to the manufacturing interest, and your supposed leanings to Lancashire, were more than enough to cause you to be regarded, by the fox-hunting majority who make laws for us, as a suspicious character. It would have answered little purpose had you brought in a Bill to ease the pressure of rates, while that pressure was ostensibly light, and, while measured by the delusive test of unreasoning arithmetic, it was said to be comparatively trivial. You could frame no statistical table that would make out a palpable case of necessity for legislative interference :

by no dint of sifting, could you have kept the golden fruit of timely help from slipping through that open sieve of truth. The policy that was needed was that of a Government clear-eyed to foresee, and fearless to foretell, and able to overbear by its moral weight the opposition of selfish incredulity. I am bound to believe that the measures you eventually suggested were early foreseen to be necessary; and that they were only held back, from a sense of inability to carry them in the proper time. This was less a fault than a misfortune, inasmuch as it was the consequence of the political torpor that prevailed—a state pleasant enough for the prosperous who want nothing, and the ambitious, who are satisfied with what they have got; but certainly not a safe one for those who are in danger, or a hopeful one for those whose distress is neither turbulent or loud.

On the 14th of July, Mr. Hibbert, representative of Oldham, inquired of Government whether they would introduce a measure enabling Boards of Guardians to raise the sums required for the existing exigency, diffusing the burthen of repayment over a

period of seven years. Thereupon, for the first time, an intimation was given, that resort would be had to the old system of Rates-in-Aid, for which there were many precedents, while for the various alternatives suggested, there were said to be none. Several of the representatives of Lancashire expressed their doubts as to the feasibility of the Ministerial mode thus indicated, of dealing with the question. Rates-in-Aid had been often tried, but they had often likewise failed. They had been resorted to in a state of society wholly dissimilar from that which now existed in Lancashire ; and they had in them the ineradicable vice of encouraging prodigality of expenditure ; but being officially prescribed as the one thing needful in the way of legislation, and it being evidently impossible to carry any other scheme by the force of independent opinion, at a period of the Session so advanced, the first reading of the Rate-in-Aid Bill was agreed to murmuringly.

On the second reading, Mr. Edmund Potter, M.P. for Carlisle, expressed his regret that Ministers had not sooner grappled with the question. They ought

long before to have sent out Commissioners to make inquiries in the Manufacturing districts, and to have proposed some more exceptional measure than the present to meet the emergency. Colonel W. Patten, M.P. for North Lancashire, showed how fallacious was the hope that a Rate-in-Aid would meet the real difficulties of the crisis. Rates, it was true, were elsewhere often higher than the point to which they had as yet risen in the Cotton districts; but where they had long been higher, they practically came out of rent, and were a charge upon property, not upon rent-paying industry. If they suddenly raised the rates in Lancashire, the burthen would fall, not upon the proprietary, so much as upon the class who stood but a little above the line of demarcation between the ratepayers and the rate-receivers. He was convinced that a measure enabling each Union to diffuse over seven years, the repayment of a loan adequate to meet the actual emergency, would be infinitely more effectual than what Ministers proposed. Lord Stanley was not prepared to take the responsibility of rejecting the only measure Government

suggested ; but preferring the method of loans to that of enabling each Union or parish to come upon its neighbours for rateable aid, at a time when all could alike ill afford to render such help, he pointed out the feasibility of combining the two powers, by the introduction of certain clauses in Committee. Lord Hartington expressed his concurrence in the views of Lord Stanley. Mr. Bovill criticized the technical language of the Bill ; and Mr. Bouverie objected to its scope and tenour, as calculated to undermine general confidence in the stability of the permanent law, which he thought capable of meeting the emergency. Mr. Henley would rather vote for a Rate-in-Aid than concede the power of borrowing ; for the former would be in accordance with the principle of the 43rd of Elizabeth, and would not, like the latter, be an innovation.


Mr. Cobden " was afraid that, however well suited the statute of Elizabeth might be to the state of Oxfordshire, it would be found very ill adapted to the condition of Rochdale. He deprecated the encouragement given to the Government, in allowing the

Session to pass, before taking measures to meet the existing state of the North of England. The existing and the impending state of things, he was convinced, were not sufficiently understood in the House. It was a fallacy to suppose that they had to deal with a community who were competent to pay rates, provided only they were imposed. In order that rates should be paid, they must have production going on ; whereas the district which he represented was rapidly approaching the state which an agricultural parish would be in if it were suddenly struck with sterility. The large capital invested in the Cotton trade was becoming, not simply unprofitable, but altogether unproductive ; and mills could only be kept open by the loss of the floating capital of those who had the misfortune to hold them. That being the case, the analogy drawn between a parish which ordinarily paid a rate of one shilling in the pound, and another which paid two or three shillings, fell to the ground. The parish which had been accustomed to pay one shilling in the pound, and which contained a large amount of capital invested in Cotton mills, had

hitherto been thus lightly taxed because these gave full employment at high wages to the population. But let the manufactories be closed, and the attempt to equalize the rate of the parish which had paid one shilling, with the rate of four shillings, which had been paid in another parish, where employment was still afforded to the population—such an attempt, before they rendered any substantial help to the parish which had fallen into a state of collapse, was out of the question. It was like going to a poor man who had been struck with paralysis and could not stir, and saying to him, ‘ My good fellow, there is another man near you who can walk half a mile ; try and walk a few yards, and do something for yourself.’ . . . They might as well go back to the legislation of the Romans as to the 43rd of Elizabeth. The principle to be adopted should be to add as little as possible to the inevitable evil, or indeed ruin, which had overtaken the Manufacturing districts. They could not avert the calamities which must befall the population there, but they ought to do everything that could be done, to give the people the chance of

tiding over the intense destitution sure to prevail for the next six or twelve months. It had been truly said that the great bulk of the mills in Lancashire were not owned by millionnaires; though an idea had been propagated, from very questionable motives, that the Cotton-spinners were men of enormous wealth. The large proportion of the profits in the Cotton trade were laid out in buildings and machinery, and made reproductive in Lancashire and Cheshire, and the great bulk of the mills and factories belonged to persons who had comparatively very little floating capital. The names of the great Cotton-spinners might be counted by scores; but the names of the men struggling up, and who by thrift, and economy, by the discovery of new machinery, and by the productiveness of their factories, made the power and greatness of the country, might be counted by thousands. These men possessed a certain amount of money; they built mills with it, got credit from their bankers and agents in Manchester, and in that way the great industry and prosperity of Lancashire and Cheshire were produced. Unfortunately the


dearth of Cotton came just in the midst of the great and rapid extension of manufacturing prosperity. The Legislature should avoid as much as possible bringing the men who had thus invested their capital to ruin ; because it was on their ability to employ the population that they must mainly depend to restore the community around them to a state of prosperity. . . . It would not be safe for the House to separate, unless Ministers were prepared to take on themselves the means of meeting the evil. The system of uniform rates would only accelerate the ruin and prostration which it was their purpose to prevent. Every new additional rate would throw out of the list a very large proportion of ratepaying assessments ; and the effect would be to multiply the number of paupers, and diminish the means for their support. It was not merely the mill-owner in the Cotton districts who was absolutely dependent on the operations of the Cotton mill ; for the small shop-keeper, who was dependent on the operatives for his profits, found himself reduced almost to the level of the labourer, by the same process that ruined the



manufacturer : so that they had large numbers subsisting on the Cotton trade, brought down to one common state of stagnation and almost ruin. A vast number of the operatives lived in their own houses, built through the means of benefit societies and other ways which were known to the Legislature, and which Parliament had promoted and fostered. These cottages had been largely built with borrowed money ; and if the owners, at the very time when they lost their income from wages, should be called on to pay an extra poor rate on their houses, in addition to interest on the mortgages, the whole of the property must be transferred from these poor people to other hands. If Parliament believed the present unnatural paralysis was more likely to be temporary than permanent, and if they hoped that in six or twelve months it would come to an end, would it not be better, acknowledging that the present state of things was exceptional, to tide over that period by borrowing money on future rates ? He was opposed to borrowing money on the security of rates in ordinary circumstances ; but no person who realized the

condition of affairs in the Cotton districts could object to the inhabitants taking the course they thought most advantageous to themselves. The Government and the House ought to be prepared to act in that case, mainly on the advice of those whose interests were at stake. The people of the Cotton districts of Lancashire and Cheshire had never hitherto been found deficient in the sagacity and prudence necessary for the proper management of their own affairs. If, therefore, it could be shown to be the general wish in those districts, that they should be invested with the power of borrowing money, for eight or ten years, to meet the prevailing distress, it would be very unwise to frustrate that desire."

There was no mistaking the ring of the familiar voice that so often and so long had representatively spoken the industrial mind of Lancashire. Had the self-respect of the manufacturing region been ever so stricken down, a speech like this would have rallied the circulation to its proud heart, and driven back the sad and shadowy tempter, already beginning to whisper—"Take of the forbidden fruit of national



charity, and ye shall *not* surely die." Hitherto it had not been touched or tasted: was it really desirable that it should ever be? Mr. Cobden gave utterance to the feeling of every man in the County Palatine who had a heart or a head worthy of being consulted in the matter, when he confidently said—No! And by the time the House was called upon to go into Committee, the response from every part of Lancashire came clear and loud, inspiring its representatives to renew their entreaties, that means should be afforded the distressed Unions for working out their own salvation in their own way.

The debate was renewed on the policy of giving to each district borrowing powers. Colonel Wilson Patten, Mr. Hibbert, General Lindsay, Colonel Legh, Lord Hartington, and Mr. Ayrton, agreed in representing the prevalent wish of the community to be in favour of resorting to such powers, rather than to Rates-in-Aid; and Mr. J. B. Smith alone of the members for Lancashire argued for the opposite scheme. Relying on estimates, furnished probably by Mr. Farnall, Government stated that the sum requisite to relieve

332,040 persons would be 864,304*l.* for the year ; and the rateable property of the county being 7,298,544*l.*, it could easily afford to bear the distributed burthen. Mr. Cobden expressed his astonishment and regret at such a statement. "The facts and arguments on which the Ministerial calculation was founded were the most fallacious he had ever heard. The estimate of operatives out of work, and of those immediately dependent upon them, was far too low ; but, taking 332,040 as the correct number, what was the amount of the relief proposed ? For each individual 864,000*l.* would give but 2*l.* 10*s.* as support for a period of many months. Government could not seriously contemplate this as a provision ; and to his mind it was but too plain that the people were to be left dependent upon private charity, which it was expected would come in to eke out rates. Rochdale had applied to Parliament for the power to raise money to meet its own distress. The representatives of the ratepayers there, said that they could keep their poor free from want, if the Legislature

would allow them to deal with their property as they thought best. Why should they oppose the wishes of this intelligent, and in their normal state, wealthy population? Only that morning he had received from Rochdale a telegram—"The Bill is at present only a mockery, and is valueless to us." Was it not monstrous to have postponed this question till the last three or four days of the Session, not even allowing Boards of Guardians time to meet together, and make known their wishes in the form of a letter, but obliging them to telegraph to their representatives what they wanted done? The objection raised against Union loans was, that Boards of Guardians would thus tax posterity, and probably waste their resources. But they would be quite as liable to waste the money if they obtained it by going to the county for a Rate-in-Aid. If they were empowered to borrow upon the security of their own rates, repayment of the loan being fixed at the end of seven or ten years, the consciousness that they themselves would probably have to pay the money would act as a check upon them, and they would have a better guarantee for careful

expenditure than if they had a Rate-in-Aid from other districts. Assuming that they must have unaccustomed succour, was it not better that they should fall back upon their own now unproductive capital, which would be sure to become productive again in the course of a few years? The very fact that in ordinary times these parishes paid so little for the relief of distress, was a proof of their ability in ordinary times to pay off any loan which might now be effected. These districts were struggling with a difficulty which they believed would be a temporary one, and they asked to be allowed to deal with it in their own way. The general feeling of Lancashire was in favour of the borrowing powers, and the London journals which, like the *Economist*, devoted themselves chiefly to the consideration of economical questions, had arrived at the same conclusion. In the name of Lancashire he was prepared to give up the Rate-in-Aid altogether, unless they could have it along with the borrowing powers. If Parliament would not give them the option of adopting the borrowing powers, or the

Rate-in-Aid, they would prefer having the borrowing powers, and not the Rate-in-Aid.”*

An amendment, conferring on each district borrowing powers, was finally carried against the Government by 95 to 88: twenty-one members for Lancashire and Cheshire voting for the amendment, and but six (two of them officials) against it. The same preponderance of local opinion was observable in the Upper House, where Lords Overstone and Egerton of Tatton concurred in recommending what other noble lords, unconnected with Lancashire, objected to as a deviation from the principle of the permanent law of relief. Substantially its justification as an exceptional measure rested upon the close identity of the rate-paying class, in manufacturing towns, with that which was suddenly plunged into distress. The case was in this respect analogous to that which had existed in Ireland in 1847, when the small occupiers of land were, by an unlooked-for calamity, reduced to the utmost want; and it was contended reasonably that such cases were broadly distinguishable from those,

* *Times* Report, 31st July, 1862.


whether agricultural or urban, in other parts of the kingdom, wherein, though rates might be habitually higher than they had yet risen in Lancashire, they had for that very reason become a fixed deduction from rent, not a temporary and onerous enhancement of it,—a charge upon property calculated in its purchase and sale, not a novel weight suddenly thrown upon waged labour and retail trade, which no one could calculate. To some the precedent appeared dangerous, though its inapplicability in ordinary instances materially qualified the danger. No one advocated, no one dreamed of advocating, the introduction of borrowing powers into the permanent Law of Relief, as a resource to be relied upon for easing the pressure of rates in ordinary times. The expedient was recommended upon the same principle as loans are raised in time of war—not because loans are wiser or better resources for meeting current expenditure than taxation, but because, in times plainly exceptional, exceptional measures are plainly more just than those which would lay sudden and exorbitant burthens on a willing and frugal people. To strain the action of the ordi-

nary law, in the vain attempt to make it meet extraordinary needs, is not to vindicate the law, but to pervert and to subvert it, by bringing it into odium and dishonour. It must be owned indeed, that many were deterred from acting on this common-sense view of the case, by their inability to define what ought to be regarded as exceptional necessity, and from a vague apprehension that the powers of borrowing demanded might be abused. Herein lay the root of all the error and the evil that ensued. Legislation had not tried beforehand to distinguish between what should be deemed specifically exceptional, and what should be regarded as but a temporary or partial *worsening* of the normal condition of things; and *nobody* would venture at the moment to launch a *legislative scheme*, or to propound a series of provisions, in the shape of a supplemental enactment, for the purpose. *Wisdom*, in the application of the borrowing power, *was* *withheld* from an apathetic Legislature, *the* *remedy* in tails of checks and guards *might* *have* *been* *worked* out by the various distressed Unions *each* *in* *its* *own* way; and whether the materials *might* *have* *been* *used*

been accumulated for subsequent legislation, had the amended Rate-in-Aid Bill been passed twelve months earlier, it were vain to speculate.

The representatives of Lancashire had asserted the principle of self-help in relief taxation ; but ere that principle could be experimentally put to the test, a new element made itself felt, which, undirected and uncontrolled in its action, necessarily rendered all previous calculations erroneous or nugatory. The public had waited in vain expectation for the development of an efficient policy in Parliament to meet the distress of Lancashire. To suffer that distress to continue unrelieved, regard being had to its origin and to the patient dignity with which it was borne, would have been a national reproach which it was felt would have been intolerable. The privileged politicians of Westminster, who had dallied and dawdled throughout the spring and summer, without evincing either the capacity or care befitting the occasion, had with difficulty been driven into making a first step in legislation late in July : but as they would soon be obliged to go grouse-shooting, it could not be

expected that anything further would be done for Lancashire during the remainder of the year. The national instincts of justice and generosity revolted at the spectacle. Was Lancashire to be left unfriended during the coming winter, because Parliament had miserably failed in its duty? Whatever it might cost, and however ill it might square with set rules and precedents, the community at large had silently made up their minds to take the matter into their own hands. The disjointed arguments and incoherent clash of loose opinions, amid which the modified Rate-in-Aid Bill had been passed, furnished conclusive demonstration, if any had been wanting, that no settled policy of any sort existed for cases of exceptional need, arising from unforeseen dearth or glut. The nation could not be blinded to the fact, and could not reconcile to its conscience the abandonment of half a million of innocent people to the effects of legislative dereliction. What Lords and Commons had neglected to do must otherwise be somehow done; unequally and awkwardly, perhaps, as things are apt to be, however



excellently meant, that are begun in haste and built up without any ground plan. But let faults and errors be set down to the account of those who, having had time and opportunity, boundless power, and the command of imperial resources, had neglected to make needful provision in fair weather against flood and storm.

On the 19th July, a meeting of noblemen and gentlemen connected with the Distressed Districts took place at Bridgewater House, at which the Earl of Derby presided. In opening the proceedings, his Lordship dwelt forcibly on the duty which lay upon them, as proprietors and capitalists, to lead the way in alleviating the privations of those whom an unforeseen calamity had overtaken and threatened to deprive of their daily bread. They had no wish to see the property of Lancashire and Cheshire exonerated from liability to support the poor. But, on the other hand, they desired, if possible, to save the Cotton Operatives from the unmerited humiliation of being reduced to the level of ordinary paupers. If the voluntary subscriptions raised were applied as they ought to be, to the relief of the Cotton Operatives and

such as were immediately dependent upon them, the Rates would be found adequate to meet all other necessities. The public subscription would no doubt "indirectly go to relieve the ratepayers, but it would be in a manner that separated the recipient of such charity from the habitual pauper, and which would not undermine the sense of self-respect which had been so meritoriously manifested, and which would enable a large proportion of those who were ratepayers, and who were themselves upon the verge of indigence, to keep their heads above water, to maintain the position they had hitherto held, and which they were still desirous of maintaining. He hoped, therefore, that they would not be influenced by any question of how high or how low the public rates for the poor happened to be in different towns; but that they would consider from general information, and from the reports of the Poor Law Inspectors, what was the actual amount of distress among those who had not yet become paupers. The object in raising funds should be, he thought, to enable such persons to maintain their position, and to keep themselves off the pauper list, to be placed upon which

men in their station considered—and justly considered—a great degradation.”

These sentiments met with the concurrence of all those who were present; and the hope was no doubt entertained by the public at large, who contributed so generously to the fund thus initiated, that the wholesome distinction so clearly pointed out by the Chairman of the Bridgewater House meeting would, as far as possible, be kept in view.

An article in the *Times* commending what had been done at the meeting, and pleading for contributive aid from the public at large, reiterated the assurance that the money was not to be made use of “to eke out rates, or to be wasted at the discretion of individuals; but it was to be entrusted to working Committees responsible to a central organization, and to be apportioned to those who were not receiving parish relief. The ratepayers would be benefited, but they would be benefited indirectly, and in that way which would least impair the productive energies of the working orders of society.” *

* *Times*, 21st July, 1862.

Has it been so? or have the national gifts been applied to the purposes whereunto they were devoted? For some time indeed appearances were kept up in print, though every day the distinction between manufacturing hands out of work and ordinary paupers was more and more disregarded in practice. During the autumn, distress increased in intensity, and national sympathy rose high in proportion. Upon Relief Committees importunity pressed sore: and there was seldom found in them firmness or foresight sufficient to withstand the pressure. Instead of advice and direction how to organize a system of inspection and supervision, which would have enabled them to discriminate between the proper objects of the bounty they had undertaken to dispense, and those who ought to have been steadily referred to the Guardians for relief, the Committees were counselled to resort to the too easy and obvious course of using as the only test of poverty on which they could depend, the admission by the Relieving Officers and the Guardians, that persons were entitled to aid. If an applicant were not able to satisfy the parochial authorities that he

was in want, he found it difficult, and sometimes impossible, to persuade the Committee to lend him any assistance. What Mr. Farnall called supplementary relief, thus became by degrees, not the exception, but the rule. Exactly the reverse of what was promised the public was performed; the Cotton hands, notwithstanding all their previous thrift and self-denial, were needlessly subjected to the humiliation of having to sue as paupers for a certain modicum of relief, before they could hope to obtain from liberal and even lavish Committees, a further amount of help. It was not pleasant of course to confess all this; and for several months few traces of the fact are discernible in the official reports.

At a meeting of the Executive Committee on the 4th of August, Mr. Mason of Ashton stated that the Relief Committee there added a supplementary grant of a fourth to what was given by the Guardians. They found the system, he said, work well, and they were disposed to adhere to it. The Mayor of Stockport recalled attention to the pledge given, that the charity of the public should be applied

on an opposite principle. Mr. Ross said that supplementary grants were in aid to the ratepayers, not to the operatives. A good deal of controversy ensued, the Mayor of Manchester agreeing with Mr. Ross, but the question was left open as before.

The Bridgewater House Committee observed with regret, that the fundamental distinction they had laid down was daily more and more openly neglected, and that amid increasing destitution, it was likely to be soon lost sight of altogether. They resolved to make an effort to recall the Central Committee in Manchester to the principle of relief which, at the beginning, had been enunciated almost without dispute; and they requested Colonel Wilson Patten and Sir J. P. Kay Shuttleworth to communicate their views. On the 8th of August these gentlemen waited on the Central Committee, and in terms alike firm and considerate, called their attention to the necessity of once for all deciding which course was to be pursued. Colonel Patten, as treasurer of the fund collected at Bridgewater House, presented resolutions which had been come to there, to the effect that he was authorized

to pay over for distribution to the Central Executive at Manchester, 4000*l.* a month for the six ensuing months; that the aid given should be dispensed through Local Committees; that it should be devoted to unemployed workmen and their families, not being dependent on the Poor Rates, and that the principles of distribution should be circulated among the Local Committees. Sir J. P. Kay Shuttleworth followed this up by presenting the heads of a scheme of distinctive distribution, which, from his experience as a Poor Law Assistant Commissioner, he undertook to say might easily and effectually be carried into operation.

The Mayor of Salford moved, and the Mayor of Blackburn seconded, a resolution adopting these views. Mr. Hugh Mason of Ashton thought the rule proposed would be found impracticable, without inflicting much hardship on the people, and working great injustice among the ratepayers. To draw a broad line of demarcation between classes would be an invidious task, and not a very easy one: for at Ashton and elsewhere all persons out of employment had been led to apply first to the Guardians for food,

and then for clothes, bedding, and fuel to the Relief Committee. The system of supplementary grants by the latter, to such as were found deserving by the former, saved much time and trouble, as well as much perversion of charity. The niggardly and selfish, who would voluntarily contribute nothing, would escape half their just and equal burthen if the Cotton Operatives were all taken off the Rates; while by the mode of giving supplemental grants, the charitably disposed would be enabled to do as much good, although that good were distributed among a greater number. He confessed that at Ashton the working out of this combined system had involved a material relaxation of the established rules of Poor Law Relief. Nevertheless he preferred adhering to the course they had hitherto taken; and he moved as an amendment,—“That this sub-committee, while gratefully acknowledging the generous offer of support from the Cotton Districts’ Relief Committee in London, respectfully invites them to reconsider the condition laid down in their resolution, confining their aid to persons not being on the Poor Rates.” This was seconded by the

Mayor of Ashton. A majority of those present inclined to the original resolution, which ultimately passed; but with an understanding, as the published reports expressed it, "that its adoption did not pledge the meeting to a recognition of the Bridgewater House principle of distribution as the best." Thus all was left uncertain as before.

On the 22nd of August, the Central Committee at Manchester was re-constituted and enlarged, under the presidency of the Earl of Ellesmere, and thenceforth it became the principal medium through which the munificent gifts of the public were conveyed to the various districts. Among its members there confessedly prevailed differences of opinion as to the best mode of administering relief; but looking at their general character, intelligence, and spirit, it is impossible to doubt that, had they been seriously counselled by the Special Commissioner, to observe a distinctive line of policy, as above indicated, they would have readily given heed to the admonition. No advice of the sort, however, was tendered. The oracle was there, but the oracle was dumb. Exactly the converse line of

policy was approved and advocated by Mr. Farnall; and the more reflecting and forethoughtful members of the Committee, despairing of what they felt to be right, gave up the point in controversy as unattainable.

Public opinion throughout the Distressed localities strongly approved of the endeavours made to concentrate in the Central Executive Committee all the resources of relief, whencesoever they might come. The managers of the Liverpool and of the Bridgewater House Funds, as well as of those sent from India and the Colonies, instinctively pursued this prudent course. An appeal was made by Lord Derby to the Mansion House Committee to follow their example,* but without success; and the injurious consequences that had been foreseen from the existence of competing benevolent bodies, were in many instances too palpably realized.

Here again, one is constrained to ask, where was the superintending guide authorized to act on

* See Proceedings of Manchester Central Relief Committee: *Times*, 23rd August, 1862.

behalf of a department, rendered wise by long experience, and careful of future consequences,—the functionary commissioned to admonish temporary and irresponsible bodies, as to the best way of doing the greatest amount of good? How did it happen that no scheme was devised by the special representative of Whitehall, for uniting the confluent streams of benevolence that took their rise in the City and at St. James's? Why, at least, was no endeavour made to do so?

The citizens of Birmingham, before offering their aid, sent two of their number, Messrs. Dixon and Wright, to inquire into the actual necessities of the case; to what extent local resources were made available under the law; and how far the more opulent classes were accepting or evading their fair share of the burthen. The report of these gentlemen, dated 23rd of August, reflects great credit on their discernment and candour. Some few worthless individuals indeed they found in each district, who, having grown rich by the vast expansion of the Cotton Trade, now strove to elude participation in the efforts that were making to mitigate the calamity that had

befallen the humbler multitude dependent upon it for bread. But noble sacrifices had been made by many to keep their people together, and to save them from the humiliation and pain of actual want. Instances are mentioned of some employers, who lent their workmen enough to keep them till better times, with the conviction that a very considerable portion of what they advanced would be lost. Owners of real property, whose names appeared in subscription-lists for only moderate sums, were spending infinitely more in wages than in ordinary seasons they were used to do. On the other hand, there were not a few owners of property in towns, whose incomes from rent had been suddenly reduced by the prevalent distress. Upon the whole, it did not appear that the wealth of Lancashire had tried to evade the charges of its moral responsibility; and other localities which were prosperous ought not to withhold their assistance in voluntary contributions. The Rate-in-Aid Act would do little to mitigate the severity of the pressure of the rates upon the class immediately above that of the operatives, inasmuch as no parish

could claim assistance of other parishes until three shillings in the pound had been spent on the poor : and a very high authority estimated that, in many cases, it would be necessary to levy six shillings in the pound before three shillings could be collected." Stockport would have to raise four or five times its ordinary amount of rates, and this implied the imposition of eight or ten times that amount, before they could obtain assistance from the remaining portions of the Union. The pressure this would bring upon the class just removed from want would be grievous, for during the winter months 150,000*l.* a week less than usual would be paid in wages ; and by that amount tradesmen of all classes would be so much the less able to pay rates for the maintenance of the poor.

Pained at the spectacle of involuntary idleness on every side around them, and denied the means of providing reproductive employment for the able-bodied, the Relief Committee tried to substitute as a test, attendance at adult schools. At first a general disposition was shown, by men as well as by women,

to comply with the regulation thus imposed. . On the face of the thing, there was nothing unreasonable about it. It might do some good : it could do no harm. Zealots in the cause of book teaching gave thanks for such an unlooked-for opportunity of diffusing a knowledge of reading, writing, and arithmetic ; and the anxious friends of peace and order rejoiced at the discovery of so cheap a device in aid of the police. The docility shown by the Operatives in conforming to the prescribed rules, and in submitting to the unaccustomed discipline of a school, was above all praise. Novelty in the first instance, lent its proverbial charm, and for a while the expedient had the look of reality ; but ineffable weariness and languor crept over the spirits of the grave and obedient, but unmalleable crowd, most of whom had for long years ceased to learn by rote, or to submit to class interrogation. No complaint was heard,—hardly anything deserving the name of objection. But those who could read faces clearly saw that the thing became intolerably irksome to the honest fellows who had for years been householders and

heads of families. They did not say, but they evidently felt, that in a certain sense they were made solemn fools of in the sight of one another. They could not, and they did not learn. There they sat, and seemed to listen quietly enough; but their thoughts were elsewhere,—busy with the remembrances of active life, or with dreams of a return to it. Wherever the alternative of outdoor labour was offered them, they almost invariably embraced it with glee; for it was an escape out of the dull childish prison to the freedom of manly toil. Evening classes for such adults as in ordinary times choose to avail themselves of them are worthy of all commendation; but it is of the essence of their nature that the attendance should be voluntary and not by compulsion. They are useful, because they provide facilities to the exceptional few, restless, quick-witted, and ambitious, who want to know more than their brethren, and who would probably become discontent if they found the ways of knowledge and the opportunities for acquiring it barred against them. Of their own accord they attend evening

classes, but not for long. They pick up a certain amount of information there, and get a sort of insight into knowledge, which often serves them in good stead in their lonelier hours of self-culture. But all this bears no other than a mechanical resemblance to the attempt to put a whole adult population back to school, as the price they must pay for their dinner. In the perplexity of the time it would perhaps have been hard to hit upon a more innocent expedient: and it must be owned that any rule in such circumstances is better than none. But why was resort to such benevolent absurdity needful? Because the right thing was not provided in time, namely, healthy and useful work. These observations of course, do not apply to the female schools, where needlework, cooking, and other domestic arts were taught, practically qualifying those instructed in them to earn a livelihood more easily, and to become better housewives and handmaids in after years.

In modern society, with its sharp divisions of labour, nothing is more desirable than an early

knowledge of how to do different things, which may provide alternative modes of employment in case of need. No creature is more helpless than a man of forty years of age who, having never learned any but one trick of subsistence, finds himself suddenly shut out of the chance of thereby earning bread,—unless it be a woman brought up in a like narrow monotony of toil, when the profits of that employment fail.

Generally speaking, the mill hands showed no unwillingness to work out of doors. They objected in many places to be associated with those whom they contemned as “self-made paupers;” and they murmured at being set to what they were led to consider useless or unproductive labour. They would readily help to bear, they said, the burthen of their maintenance, if avocations were found them that did not obviously imply disbelief in the necessity of their case, and that did not compel them to associate, for the first time in their lives, and for no fault of their own, with the dissolute and worthless, whose own bad habits had made them paupers. On these grounds they objected to oakum-picking and the stoneyard,


and asked for employments more suitable to their previous condition, which they hoped soon to regain. Mr. Thomas Mawdesley, secretary to the Cotton Spinners' Association; Mr. W. Leigh, of Hyde; Mr. W. Gee, of Stockport; and Mr. Thomas Banks, of Bolton, undertook on their behalf to make their wishes known to the Government, to their representatives in Parliament, and to those engaged in the distribution of relief. In London they obtained interviews with Ministers, who promised that the matter should have the fullest consideration. At Manchester, on the 22nd August, they were received as a deputation from the Cotton operatives by Messrs. Egerton, M.P., Legh, M.P., and Aspinall Turner, M.P., who declared that they thought their requests reasonable, and agreed to lay them before their respective Boards of Guardians. It is worthy of notice that, in the discussion reported to have taken place between the deputation and the representatives of the county and city above-named, no allusion is made to any other power or discretion than that of the Poor Law authorities. All separation of classes

seems to have been by this time broken down. The hope of being treated as distinct and apart had entirely disappeared; and all that the mill hands henceforth sought for was, that if they must apply to the Union for relief out of Rates like ordinary paupers, and submit to labour-tests like them, some discrimination should still be made as to the sort of work given them, and that they should not be indiscriminately set to identical tasks. If the whole of the relief then administering had come out of Rates, and if no pledge had been given to the public, who contributed so large a portion of it, that their benevolence should be applied in preventing the Cotton workers from being reduced to the level of paupers, less might have been said, and a great deal less would certainly have been felt, at the neglect of any provision to secure what these poor people so earnestly desired. Difficulties no doubt there might have been, in conducting a twofold system of Poor Relief based on the absolute, if not the accurate discrimination of exceptional from ordinary destitution: but these difficulties would have been avoided if the pledge

above referred to had been redeemed, by the two great classes being kept apart, and by the national bounty being applied directly and distinctively to its proper object. For this a separate system of inspection and supervision, similar in its nature to that of Relieving Officers and Sub-committees of Guardians, though differing in its action and probably in some of its forms, would have been indispensable; but it can hardly be said to have been ever attempted: nor is there any evidence that the Special Commissioner ever seriously urged its creation. Yet the want of it rendered Relief Committees altogether helpless of themselves to stem the in-draught of abuse and imposture. Everywhere they drifted unresistingly further and further from their original moorings. Every day the idea was more and more completely forgotten, of discriminating between social worth and social worthlessness; between long habits of self-restraint and hardened ways of vice; between industry, frugality, and the pride of self-dependence, on the one hand, and of indolence, thriftlessness, and mendicancy on the other. For want of administra-

tive courage, skill, and vigour, things essentially unlike were suffered to become inextricably commingled, with all their conflicting necessities and incidents, until the best rules for Poor Relief were for the time completely obliterated, and the moral pluck, industry, and self-respect of the people were, for the time, completely broken down. Without necessity, contrary to sound policy, and in open disregard of the express or implied condition upon which public munificence had been drawn forth, multitudes of respectable persons were compelled to brand themselves as paupers, in order that they might obtain a share, of what had never been asked or intended for them, in that capacity. No wonder they complained of being further humiliated, by having to labour at tasks avowedly devised and used as tests to discover, in ordinary times, who were impostors and who were really in need. To them these tests were obviously inapplicable; but paralysed as the Parochial and Union system of Relief had become, owing to the want of practical guidance where people had been taught to look for it, and the want of that special assistance

which Parliament might and ought to have afforded, there seemed to the disheartened and bewildered Guardians nothing for it, but to hold by the disjointed labour-tests as long as they could, and when they could no longer, to suffer them quietly to be swept away. Useful public works, if set a-going even at the end of the summer of 1862, by local Municipalities or other responsible bodies, would have retrieved a vast amount of error, and prevented a vast amount of evil. We have it on the best authority—that of the eminent engineer whose advice too late was sought, and whose suggestions, long after the crisis had passed, were to some extent acted upon,—we have it on the authority of Mr. Rawlinson, that at the very time when no better work than picking oakum or breaking stones was found for Cotton operatives, there were in Ashton eleven miles, and in Blackburn seventeen miles of streets in such an unlevelled and unpaved condition, that the railway companies had repeatedly served notice upon the householders, that they could not be held responsible for delivering parcels therein. Nevertheless Parliament



dispersed without taking, or professing to take, any thought of what in this respect ought to be done; and for the remainder of the year, distress and demoralization went on deepening day by day.

One of the most desirable results hoped for from the superintendence of a Special Commissioner, was the establishment of something like uniformity in Relief. The Central Executive Committee sought in its own way to vindicate itself from all imputation of partiality, by adopting as its rule of distribution, that it would only make grants where local subscriptions had already been raised, and in proportion to their amount. The principle thus acted on was one perhaps of obvious justice, as between parish and parish; but it was one calculated to work the greatest possible hardship where the greatest possible degree of liberality was called for. As was touchingly pointed out by a clergyman, in a letter addressed to the Mansion House Committee,* “the effect of that regulation would be, that the charity of the nation would find its way into those wealthy neighbourhoods where it

* 30th August, 1862.


was least wanted, while the poor and needy would be left to starve, simply because it was their misfortune to reside in a district where only poverty existed." Naturally enough, all who had to do with such districts implored the Lord Mayor, and his philanthropic associates in the City, not to follow Lord Derby's advice, nor to renounce their independent control over the funds placed at their disposal. From the first they had pursued precisely the opposite plan, giving chiefly, if not exclusively, where they were led to believe there was most pressing need, and least local help; and in this too there was a true and manifest seeking after right and justice, though in a way unavoidably beset with difficulties and dangers. The two systems remained unassimilated, and continued to hold on each its separate way. If it was not in the power of Government to relegate them to their distinct objects, it was still desirable and possible that the standard of Parochial Relief throughout the distressed Unions should have been rendered uniform if not identical, and that gross inequalities should not have been presented month after month in the amount of legal

relief given, and the amount of Rates imposed in contiguous parishes. Nothing like uniformity, not even any approach to it, is discoverable, however, as having been brought about; or for aught that appears in published documents, having been seriously urged by Mr. Farnall as a thing desirable, upon the various Boards of Guardians. While at Preston the rates were in August, 2s. 0½*d.* in the pound, and at Blackburn, 1s. 10¾*d.* in the pound; at Wigan they amounted to no more than 10¾*d.* in the pound; yet in the last-named Union the people were far more liberally relieved, the chief part of the burthen being borne by the Relief Committees, whose scale of allowance was from eighteen-pence to two shillings a head per week — a scale considerably higher than that adopted at the time in Blackburn and Preston.

Blackburn had been among the first places to suffer from the effects of glut in foreign markets. The rate of increase in its power of production had been rapid beyond parallel. In ten years the population dependent on wages had increased from 46,000 to 63,000; and the chief produce of their labour being intended

for India, when the markets there became overstocked, the mills gradually ceased working; and several months before the American Blockade was declared, a large number of hands were thrown out of work. In August, one-third of the entire of the inhabitants were reduced to a state of destitution. Of these, 11,402 were on the rates; while 13,146 were relieved by Committees. The only out-door work provided by the Guardians consisted of levelling a piece of ground near the Infirmary, upon which 600 men were employed, at wages somewhat higher than the rate of Relief, and for which there was consequently no little competition. In the sewing schools, two shillings a-week was earned by the young women, by three days' work therein. The conduct of the people is stated to have been most exemplary, the police having hardly anything to do, and the streets after ten o'clock at night being wholly deserted. The rate of relief was advanced about this time from one shilling to one shilling and sixpence.

The Guardians of Blackburn had early asked the Poor Law Board to relax their order requiring relief



to the able-bodied to be given half in kind, and only on compliance with the labour-test: but the application was refused. Mr. Arnold vindicates the propriety of this refusal, though he asserts that, owing to the suddenness and extent of destitution, it was at Oldham and other places impossible to observe the rule; and he says that—"Had it not been for the general establishment of Relief Committees there might have been occasion to record a great failure on the part of the Boards of Guardians. Fortunately this charitable agency came to their assistance."* Here is the avowal of the whole policy pursued during the two following years. Nominally, the law was to be maintained, and a belief in its sufficiency was to be professed; practically, its sufficiency was from the first despaired of, and a succedaneum sought in public alms. I am not about to argue that the ordinary means of Relief out of Rates would have proved sufficient, or that, in circumstances so exceptional, it would have been wise to make the experiment of dispensing with exceptional aid. What I contend for is, that it was

* Hist. of Cotton Famine, p. 104.

the duty of Government to provide such temporary aid, and to have undertaken its administration, rather than have left all to the chance of voluntary interposition on the part of the public, and to the certainty that any interposition of the kind must, from its very nature, be exercised in a way dangerous to the morals of the people. Individual charity, when about its holy work, treads softly, if not in silence, and wears the garb of decent consideration for the misery it would relieve. And thus it is twice blessed—blessed in him who mutely gives, and him whose gratitude is whispered low. Nothing can be more unlike the loud bustle of the best behaved mob urging their collective importunities on a benevolent Committee in the town hall. The money clutched by each hungry claimant may be enough and no more; starvation and pestilence may be averted, and the police may have little to do; but will any one seriously say that the spectacle suggests no painful and anxious regrets, that a multitude who lately ministered to their own necessities, and who would still gladly give twenty shillings' value for every twenty shillings' worth of

food and raiment, should not have had the opportunity of doing so? To blame a sinking crew for jumping on a raft, would be as foolish as to cavil at its construction, or to doubt the worth and humanity of those who hastily put it together. The question still remains—Where were the lifeboats? and why were they not betimes put in requisition? This is a question it behoves a sea-going people to ask until they get an answer; and it is when the storm has gone down and the weather grown fair, that the question ought to be put, and, with a view to the future, answered. For as sure as the energies of enterprize are irregular, and the temptations to over-production every now and then irresistible, so surely will the pulse of a world-wide commerce prove intermittent, and popular industry be liable to flag, nay, even to faint. What sort of a national policy is it then, that warnings fail to warn, and that the conviction of recurring liability to great and wide-spread disaster does not move to legislative forethought?

The inadequacy of the legislative measures taken to meet the distress became more and more palpable. Happily, it seemed only to stimulate the liberality of the

nation to make good spontaneously what its rulers had failed to do in its name. The *Examiner*, in general a lenient critic of the acts of the Administration, told the truth, when it exclaimed against the short-sighted policy, of trying to compel an entire community to accept the degrading position of paupers, as a condition precedent to the minimum of relief; and against the purblind wisdom of Parliament, which passed an Act, "breaking the back of operative independence, before filling its belly with food."*

The facility with which Boards of Guardians were led into the indiscriminate and almost universal adoption of the Allowance System, without disguise or apology, may seem incomprehensible to those who have been engaged in the local administration of Poor Relief in other parts of the country. The Act of 1834 was specifically passed to put an end to that system. Other reforms were, it is true, contemplated and accomplished by it, of evils that in particular places had become of pressing magnitude, or that at particular times were felt to be so grievous as to

* *Examiner*, 8th November, 1862.


require peremptory and rigorous correction. But no evil theretofore prevailing throughout the kingdom was found to have become so demoralizing, and none was branded by the Legislature so indelibly with the marks of its reprobation, as that of giving weekly Relief out of Rates in aid of wages. In the debates upon the Bill of 1834, this question occupied a chief place. Lord Althorpe, the most humane and considerate of politicians, and Lord Brougham, who throughout his long career has ever wished to be identified in sympathy with the working man, vied with one another in denouncing the practice, as one which went to the very root of habits of providence and forethought on the part of the poor, and as the most short-sighted folly on the part of employers who wished to keep, at the expense of the parish, a greater number of labourers within call, than they could permanently find work for or afford to pay. For many years after the passing of the New Poor Law, the enforcement of its prohibition to allow wages out of rates, formed the main topic of controversy between the Central Authority and the Local Boards. The

law was held up to the indignation of the humane as hard and cruel; and though the leaders of both the great political parties in the State concurred in maintaining it in its integrity, many of its provisions, and this one more perhaps than any other, became a mark of distinction, and a topic of reproach. Amid the loudest cries, at many a county and borough election, was heard the shout of—"Down with the new Poor Law!" The Commissioners nevertheless persevered, and throughout the agricultural districts of the kingdom, the Allowance System was at length suppressed; and in these it may be said to be now practically unknown.

How comes it then, that in Lancashire we find it resorted to without hesitation, and almost as a matter of course, upon the occurrence of a great emergency like the Cotton Famine, with the sanction, if not at the instigation, of the Special Commissioner sent down from Gwyder House, to expound authoritatively "the true spirit and breadth of the Poor Law"? It is impossible to believe that various and dissimilarly constituted Boards of Guardians would have fallen in without hesitation, or the betrayal of

any economic qualm, with a scheme so objectionable and dangerous on the face of it, had it then been presented to them for the first time. The fact is, however, that to the Lancashire Guardians, the grant of rates to eke out wages had in it little of novelty. With the insidious expedient most of them had long been familiar ; and when, ten years before, an attempt had been made to establish in this respect uniformity of practice between the agricultural and manufacturing Unions, they had offered a resistance so combined and so effectual, that the well meant effort was speedily abandoned by the then head of the Department. On the 25th of August, 1852, Sir John Trollope, as President of the Poor Law Board, issued a General Order to 110 Unions, the fifth Article of which declared that "no relief should be given to any able-bodied male person, while employed for wages, or other hire, or remuneration." The Boards of Guardians, not only in Lancashire but in many other manufacturing and trading districts, forthwith assembled, and *uno flatu* repudiated the rule thus enunciated, publicly and without reservation.

Newcastle and Nottingham, Huddersfield and Keighley, Merthyr Tydfil and Holborn, Ashton and Rochdale, alike protested against the impracticability of the system recommended. Numerous deputations waited upon various members of the Government, to remonstrate against its enforcement; and on the 14th December, 1852, a circular was issued, enclosing an amended Order, which virtually rescinded the former, by defining its purport to be the prohibition of relief out of rates, on the same days of the week, on which the applicant received any payment for labour in wages. The Guardians of Manchester, Norwich, and other places of importance undertook to carry out the regulation as originally proposed, though not without many reservations as to circumstance and class, unnecessary to enumerate here. Upon the whole, it must be admitted that the rule, so rigorously enforced from the passing of the Act in 1834, throughout the agricultural districts, was abandoned in the manufacturing and commercial towns. But so long as times continued prosperous and work was abundant, the disposition was evinced by many Boards of



Guardians to keep the allowance system within narrow limits : and with this successive heads of the Department were fain to be content.

During the last two years, however, the allowance system has been set up anew, and sanctioned in every form and to every conceivable extent in Lancashire ; and it will be no easy matter by-and-bye to persuade either Guardians, Ratepayers, or Operatives working half time in that county, that there is anything essentially wrong, in paying out of rates, three days' wages in the week without their being earned. This like other metes and bounds of the reform in parochial economy established in 1834 has been broken down ; and who shall undertake to set it up again ?

Things were at their worst in the December of this melancholy year. In the last week of November, 1861, the total number of persons relieved out of Rates in the twenty-seven Distressed Unions had been 69,155 ; in the first week of December, 1862, it was 284,418. Thus, in the space of twelve months, the number of persons seeking parochial relief in the

Cotton Districts had been augmented fourfold, irrespective of the multitudes relieved only by the Committees and by individual charity. Rates everywhere were steadily rising; and from all quarters of the kingdom subscriptions were pouring in. Famine there was none, nor could there be said to prevail anything in the shape of physical suffering through want of raiment, fuel, or shelter, such as we are accustomed to associate with that spectral name. It was not as in India or in Ireland, where in former periods the staple food of the population had suddenly perished, and where, from the extent of the country smitten by dearth, and the inaccessibility of many portions of it, it was found difficult to disseminate supplies imported from abroad, or to find the materials for a trustworthy disbursement of pecuniary aid. I shall never forget the incidents of a painful conference in which I took part, early in the winter of 1846, when news reached Dublin from a remote parish, situated in one of the Western counties, that not a day's subsistence remained therein, and that the snow had begun to fall so heavily in the mountain

passes, that there seemed an immediate peril of whole villages being literally starved to death, within twenty miles of the County town. The paralysis of despair seemed to have settled on the peasantry, too long taught to look to Government interposition as all-powerful in every case of emergency, and too destitute of the aid and direction which a resident middle class is alone capable of efficiently affording, in seasons of trouble. Railroads in the district there then were none, and it was a question at the moment whether it would be found possible, by sending directions express through the medium of the constabulary, to have the roads kept sufficiently clear to enable a few cart-loads of meal to be transmitted to the land-locked region. It was by my lamented friend, the late Mr. John Robert Godley, that tidings of the exigency had been brought, and it was owing altogether to his promptitude and energy that they were brought just in time. The unhappy villagers for whom he pleaded were respited; and some of them may still survive to bless his memory. But spasmodic efforts of this kind on the part of the

Executive were of comparatively little avail as the horrors of destitution spread, and pestilence came to glean in the field of famine. One hasty experiment of relief was made after another, any or all of which might have been tried at half the cost, and made with double the success, had there been pre-concert, pre-arrangement, or the settled principles of a recognised policy, in forming them. I have certainly no personal motive to undervalue the good that was accomplished, or to depreciate the motives of its authors; but I cannot recall what I witnessed at that time without a deep sense of the responsibility that, after such a terrible example, Parliament must incur, if it takes no thought while it may, as to what is to be done in times of social and industrial emergency.

In Lancashire, when the evil day came, all was different. You had a singularly condensed and accessible population to deal with; and you had dwelling amongst them, ready and eager for the discharge of all the duties of benevolence, a varied middle class, unsurpassed in moral worth and intelli-

gence by any in Christendom. Without waiting for official promptings or external aid, they had everywhere formed themselves into Local Committees and Associations, and without fuss or noise they had gently helped along the stricken industry of their districts through many a sinking day. They kept the fire alight on many a weaver's hearth, week after week, while any hope remained of reviving trade; and though at length they found themselves baffled and overborne by popular want, they had the priceless satisfaction of feeling, not only that they had done their duty, and done it well, but that, by their noiseless and unpretentious interposition, they had broken the shock of a calamity, which, had it come abruptly, might have entailed misery of which one hardly likes to speak. But when at last Parliament affected to take the matter in hand, and bade the Executive do what was needful *in favorem vitæ*, though without adequate instructions what to do, the existence of the Relief Committees, and their elastic organization, under one administrative centre in Manchester, presented facilities for the dispensation

of public Relief, rare in their moral and intellectual excellence. One would have thought that with such materials on the one hand, and with the well-served machinery of Poor Law Administration on the other, it would have been easy, at all events, to prevent confusion, and to promote the development of what was useful in each, without spoiling the efficiency of both. It seems, notwithstanding, as though from the outset, the person on whom you relied for constant and accurate information, was either insensible of the importance of keeping the two systems clear, or that for some reason, he deliberately took the opposite course.

Mr. Farnall's Report thus describes the state of things on the 21st of January, 1863. Out of a population of 1,984,955, the Census Commissioners had recently set down 355,000 as Cotton Operatives, and 178,959 as other working hands mainly dependent on the Cotton trade, making a total of 533,959. The whole of this population had not indeed been left without work. A few mills were still going, the demand not having altogether ceased for the par-

ticular fabrics they produced, or their owners preferring to keep their hands employed, even at a heavy loss, rather than support them in idleness, or bid them look for sustenance as paupers. In other instances the manufacturers continued to work, some two, some three, and some four days a week ; but by far the greater number were unable to command the requisite capital for carrying on their business, even to this extent, with the raw material at gambling prices, and with the demand for piece goods reduced almost to nothing. From the Returns furnished by the twenty-seven Boards of Guardians in the distressed Unions, and by the Relief Committees in each of them, Mr. Farnall computed that there were, at the beginning of 1863—

Working full time	121,129
Working short time	165,600
Wholly unemployed	247,230
	<hr/>
Total	533,959

He then proceeded to classify the different kinds of succour administered to their wants, and to discriminate the modes in which it was administered :

Relieved (out of doors) by Guardians	232,232
Relieved by Committees and <i>not</i> by Guardians	236,310
	468,542
Total	468,542

After leaving a wide margin for errors in this statement, what does it come to? Out of 533,959 persons usually employed in the Cotton trade, or in avocations dependent thereon, in twenty-seven distressed Unions, 121,129 were still in full work. There remained therefore but 412,830 wholly or in part out of work. Yet we are told—not that this number only, but that a much larger one—namely, 232,232, were receiving relief from the Guardians, and 236,310 were receiving relief from Committees, these latter *not* being then in receipt of parochial relief:* in all, 468,542 individuals. In other words, we are here circumstantially informed, upon the authority of a Special Commissioner for the Distressed Districts, that upwards of 50,000 persons in full work were partakers of national charity, or of Local Rates. Twice over, in

* Mr. Farnall's Report, 21st January, 1863.—Appendix to Ann. Rep. Poor Law Com., pp. 55-6.

different pages of this astounding document, the same miscalculation is given, so that we are not at liberty to ascribe the result to any oversight or inadvertency. The fundamental classification of the community is taken from the Census, and this, we presume, cannot have been very far wrong. The permanent poor receiving in-door relief are carefully excluded from the computation. An analysis, professing to be careful and minute, is given of the existing condition of employments, whether complete or partial. Credulity is chased into so many pens, and fastened up there beyond the power of escape; and then what have we? A formal declaration that 232,232 persons derived their weekly support from Boards of Guardians, and another and different body of 236,310 derived their weekly maintenance from Relief Committees, and not from Boards of Guardians, making together 468,542, or 65,417 persons more than Mr. Farnall says were in need of any relief at all.

But this is not all. Under the vague and undescriptive heading of "working short time," are

classed no fewer than 165,600 persons, some of whom, it must be presumed, could not have been in urgent want. Without the means of analysing the various gradations of deficient employment, it would be rash to hazard any sweeping conjecture, as to the proportion of those whose earnings were too scanty to provide the means of livelihood without public aid. But as it is notorious that several mills were kept going, some two, some three, and some four days in the week, at the period in question, and that in other branches of trade employers continued, some through generosity and some through prudence, to give their people regular though not full work, we shall not err probably, in assuming that a considerable deduction ought to be made from the 165,600 who are set down as working short time. If then, we take off a fifth upon this score, and add it to the 65,417 above indicated, we arrive at the marvellous result, according to Mr. Farnall's arithmetic, that 100,000 people were asking and obtaining relief who could have done without it. In a subsequent report, the Special Commissioner declares that, in his opinion, "there has

been a singularly small amount of imposition, as compared with the great amount of real distress."* The science of social equations is, perhaps, still in its infancy; and every man is consequently entitled to fix for himself what may be deemed a fair and reasonable proportion of imposture: but most people will probably think that what is here asserted is rather more than national munificence contemplated, or than national recollection can with equanimity endure.

But what if the whole pile of computation from which is hung out loosely this sad and shameful inference, should prove no better than a house of cards hastily put together, without solidity or cohesion, and liable to be as readily blown down? It were a grave wrong to Lancashire to believe the figures above quoted to be literally correct, or substantially correct, or nearly correct, or, in fact, correct at all. When the distress was deep, and thick darkness hung over the future, the hearts of many, no doubt, who were entrusted with the duty of dispensing relief, misgave

* Report, 10th April, 1863.—Appendix to Fifteenth An. Rep. Poor Law Com., p. 70.

them ; in the perplexity of pity for mute and decent want which looked to them for aid, mistakes of course occurred, and the distribution of relief was not always guided by an unerring hand. But it is too much to ask us to believe that scores of thousands of persons in full work, imposed on Boards of Guardians and Relief Committees, and that multitudes of individuals earning enough for livelihood, though nought to spare, were practising systematically (and if at all, notoriously) a scandalous course of fraud.

The truth appears to be that, with probably the best intentions, your Special Commissioner did not understand the complicated case with which he had to deal ; and consequently he was unable to keep you accurately advised of the state of things around him, —to exercise any ascendant influence in the name of the Government, in the established councils of Relief appointed by law, or in the extra-legal councils of charity appointed by the people. His language, like his mind, wavered in the conflicting winds of local opinion. To humour the impetuosity with which national benevolence at first rushed to effect its

purpose, he was ready to acquiesce in any distribution of money, clothes, or food, however little in accordance it might be with those well-considered rules and principles which, for nearly thirty years, had been, for the sake of the labouring classes themselves, maintained by your predecessors. Doles of money to eke out wages, not here or there, as though in error or through oversight, but systematically and by wholesale, received his tacit sanction. The condition of reasonable out-door work, by able-bodied men receiving aid, was sometimes dwelt on by Mr. Farnall as a thing so useful and so just, that it ought to be enforced as indispensable. But either he did not know, or he did not tell you, that no means existed for practically exacting such a condition; and that until special means were devised, it was simply ridiculous to talk about it in a loose and general way. Far better would it have been to have said plainly to the Factory hands, as Lord Derby, Sir J. P. K. Shuttleworth, and Mr. Cobden would have had him say,—“The rule of ordinary pauperism does not apply; we need no test of your indigence; we bear in mind your thrift and toil while work was to

be had ; and as the State has neglected to provide you with alternative employment, we shall give you wherewithal to keep you alive till trade returns." This would have been a miserable confession of legislative improvidence ; but it would have been honest, manly, and true. It would have had the merit of conferring distinctly upon a class eminently deserving of it, a signal obligation ; and though political or social gratitude is not one of those things in which I am disposed sanguinely to believe, I am willing to own that, as a historic fact, accurately chiselled out from the mass of ordinary relief, it would have long been held in honour, and regarded as a moral monument of social progress. But when all discrimination as to the origin of Distress, and all distinction as to the degrees of its intensity had been broken down, it was mischievous beyond expression to sanction the disuse generally of the labour-test ; and it was, if possible, still more mischievous to keep up an unreal and inconsistent talk about it, thereby teaching the people not to believe what was solemnly propounded by authority.

Taught by the additional experience derived (or at least derivable), from what took place during the interval between the close of one Parliamentary Session and the commencement of another, many persons cherished the hope that you might have been able, when the two Houses re-assembled in February, to persuade them to adopt comprehensive measures for dis-pauperizing those who ought never to have been made paupers in the ordinary sense of the term. From what subsequently took place, I cannot harbour a doubt, that individually you would have been willing to assume the responsibility of initiating such a policy. Had you been supplied, as you might and ought to have been, with a suitable scheme of exceptional employment for the hands out of work in Lancashire, in consequence of the continued suspension of the Cotton Trade, you would have gladly laid it on the table the first day of the Session. Public confidence would have rallied at your appeal; the Government would have gained credit for beneficent ability; the waste and blundering of the twelve preceding months would have been forgiven and forgotten; and the administration

of the Poor Law in the distressed Unions would have naturally and easily reverted to its old mode of procedure, the landmarks being again set up which had been unwisely overthrown. There were already symptoms of amendment discernible in some localities. At Stockport, the waters seemed to abate as rapidly as they had risen. Instead of 1424 hands on full time, there were in the middle of January 4323, and the number of hands wholly out of work had diminished by more than a fourth. The discrimination between Cotton Operatives and other persons in distress, previously lost sight of, began to be observed; and the Relief Committee having taken charge of 18,000, and the Guardians of 6000, an understanding was come to, that no individual should be assisted by both. This was indeed an excellent arrangement for the latter body, who were thus enabled to provide for all demands upon them, by a rate of 1s. 4d. in the pound for the quarter; and as matters continued to improve, a still lower charge was found sufficient in the subsequent portions of the year. The total amount—in food, clothing, and money—expended weekly in the

town, out of Rates and Relief Subscriptions taken together, was about 3000*l.*, equivalent to nearly half of what had been usually expended in wages. A great deal of charity however was still dispensed through other channels. The correspondent of the *Times* stated as a fact, that not a single communicant, either Church or Dissent, had been allowed to come upon the Relief List. Numbers of families were supported by the private benevolence of persons living at a distance, through the intervention of ministers of religion : as many as a hundred poor people being regularly supplied with necessaries in one instance in this way. The scale of relief did not materially exceed at Stockport that of other places ; nevertheless, apprehensions were already felt of the ill effects likely to be produced, especially on the younger men, who had been left for months without any regular employment : and if these misgivings have not since been realized, it must be owned that credit is due to the industrious disposition of the people themselves, who would not be led into temptation.

Elsewhere the accumulation of burthens meanwhile

grew more than ever insupportable. The rate of expenditure rose without check, until at Glossop it reached *9s. 3d.* in the pound from the Union, and *14s. 8d.* from the Relief Committee, equal to a total charge of *1l. 3s. 11d.* in the pound upon the rateable value. In Ashton the charge was at the rate of *6s.* from the Union, and *16s. 4d.* from the Relief Committee, equal to a total of *1l. 2s. 4d.*; and in Preston it was at the rate of *5s. 5d.* from the Union, and *6s. 3d.* from the Relief Committee, equal to a total of *11s. 8d.**

For many months Ashton-under-Lyne enjoyed the sad pre-eminence of exacting more from public charity, and spending it to less good purpose, than any other Union in the county. The main causes of the abuses, which so often have been described, lay in the obstinacy wherewith its well-disposed but contentious citizens persisted in maintaining two Relief Committees to do as rivals, and therefore to do badly, what one Committee might have done well. Sec-

* Debate in Committee: Renewal of Rate-in-Aid Bill. Speech of Mr. Hibbert, 2nd March, 1863.

tarian jealousy appears to have been at the root of this folly, giving rise not only to much scandal, but to much waste of resources that ought to have been husbanded with religious care, and betraying the poor, by an open competition for their daily gratitude, into the frequent practice of deception and imposture. It is needless now to recount instances which, at the time, were justly held up to public rebuke, in the local and Metropolitan journals; or to dwell at length upon the mischievous consequences of permitting such a system of mal-administration to go on, without any weighty reproof from authority, or any efficient attempt to put a stop to it. Here was indeed a case where one would have thought official interposition in some shape might have proved useful. Was it the enervating fear of unpopularity that prevented anything being said or done, to recall the wayward and erring Committee-men of Ashton to a sense of the duty they owed to their neighbours in distress, from whom their factious proceedings withdrew what could ill be spared? In January, the *Guardians*, finding that they were utterly outbidden by the

indiscriminate zeal of the two Committees, made up their minds to abstain, as far as possible, from adding to the mischief; and for the time being they quietly proceeded to contract the circle of legal Relief. In this way another deviation was caused, illegitimate in its nature, though unavoidable perhaps under the circumstances, from the permanent rules of Poor Law Administration; and although it may be averred that no demonstrable harm ensued therefrom, the least thoughtful observer must perceive that a precedent was thereby set, of the most subversive and sinister kind. The public, however, have never learned that any direct notice of the facts here adverted to was taken, either at the time or subsequently, by the Department whose especial function and business it is to take cognizance of such matters. Happily the example of Ashton did not prove contagious. Nowhere else was the good work of charity marred by the existence of rival Committees; and nowhere else did the same misuse of national gifts take place notoriously, continuously, and without reproof.

The only Relief measure adopted by Parliament in February, was the renewal of the Rate-in-Aid Bill. Sixteen Unions had availed themselves, though in different ways, of the provisions of the Act. Five had made use of the borrowing powers, seven had taken advantage of the Rate-in-Aid, and four had resorted to both expedients to ease the burthen of immediate liabilities. As might have been expected, the total amount borrowed was inconsiderable, regard being had to the huge mass of expenditure. Between Midsummer and Michaelmas, Preston had borrowed 3890*l.*, and Blackburn 3517*l.* In the next quarter, Ashton borrowed 8037*l.*; Blackburn, 10,000*l.*; Glossop, 1200*l.*; Haslingden, 3063*l.*; Preston, 7316*l.*; Rochdale, 5887*l.*; Todmorden, 7186*l.*; making a total of 38,850*l.* There were besides charged to the counties, as Rates-in-Aid, for Ashton, 8097*l.*; Glossop, 1715*l.*; Haslingden, 2193*l.*; and Preston, 7571*l.*; in all 19,576*l.*; making a total charged on counties, and borrowed on the credit of future rates, of 68,675*l.* The Government were well aware of the enormous ~~burden~~ *weight* ~~to~~ *to* ~~a~~ *to* ~~great~~ *to* ~~number~~ *to* of the population remaining

unemployed; and they knew what distressing sacrifices of property were daily made owing to this state of things. These matters were eminently deserving of the especial consideration of Parliament. Ministers did not underrate the distress which existed, or the evils to be overcome;* but for the present they had only to propose a renewal of the Act of the previous Session, of which other Unions were ready to avail themselves. Several members connected with Lancashire expressed their belief that a more comprehensive policy was requisite. Mr. Hibbert stated that out of 110,000 inhabitants of Oldham, 37,000 were operatives, and that of these more than 10,000 were wholly unemployed. In answer to the question, why were not local Rates made available in every case to meet the requirements of the people? Colonel W. Patten furnished instances where the rated occupiers had already been compelled to pay, as in Stockport, nine times, and in Glossop, more than nineteen times what they were ordinarily liable to pay. No one objected to the renewal of the

* Hansard, vol. clxxxix. p. 274.

Act, but many members intimated that they thought something far different was needed.

As the days grew long, and the inclemency of winter passed away, regrets forced themselves anew to every reflective mind, that no provision had been made, for enabling able-bodied men to perform some species of productive work in return for the Relief afforded them. It was not the fault of Parliament that the enterprise of the District still slept, that foreign markets were still glutted, and that the American Blockade still rendered Cotton scarce and dear. It was not the fault of Parliament, that the spare hands of Lancashire were not suddenly transported to other manufacturing regions, or to the Colonies; for in neither was there any certainty of their being able to earn their bread: and without such certainty, it would have been cruel and unwise to have stimulated migration or emigration on an extensive scale. It was not the fault of Parliament, that public liberality continued still to flow in from every quarter, inspired, as it seemed, by one feeling only—that no man in Lancashire should perish for lack of food.

But the Legislature was grievously to blame in having taken no steps to find the people work, of the simple and healthful kind they were willing to perform, in the neighbourhood of their homes. The preposterous tales regarding the effeminacy of Operative fingers had ceased to be repeated, save as a mournful jest. Wherever Boards of Guardians had attempted to provide out-door labour for men and youths, they had succeeded admirably. Even in the coldest weather, the health of those employed did not suffer; and the occupation, partly perhaps from its novelty, but mainly no doubt from its invigorating nature, ceased to be regarded as onerous or distasteful. Boards of Guardians would gladly have done much more in this way had they possessed the power; but without an Act of Parliament they found themselves at fault. They had no authority to break up streets or highways in order to make sewers; they could not level or remove obstructions, open new ways of communication; build cisterns, or extend supplies of water. Everywhere these things lay undone, though urgently requiring to be done. The Municipal bodies naturally

shrank from undertakings for which, acting in the ordinary way, they would have had to impose inopportunately new burthens in the shape of Rates ; and though everyone agreed that the occasion ought to be improved, to accomplish what was so much required, Government hesitated to move in the matter. Questions were put and returns moved for in Parliament indicative of discontent ; but the information sought for was slow in coming. At length complaint waxed loud. The Distress, though appreciably lessening when compared with that of previous months, still continued great and general. Idleness was becoming the normal condition of the Factory Districts ; and the very completeness of the eleemosynary system, whereby Famine was kept at bay, rendered that spectacle of idleness growing into a habit all the more painful. Lancashire was quiet, and "good society" was content. There were no deaths from hunger ; the rate of mortality was low ; myriads of once independent self-supporting people were sinking down into pauperism, unadmonished and undeterred by its statutable incidents ; and Westminster cared for none of these things.

On the 27th of April, Mr. Ferrand moved that "in the opinion of the House, it was the duty of the Government to take into consideration without delay, what measures might be necessary to relieve the Distress which prevailed in the Cotton manufacturing Districts, so that the people might no longer continue unemployed." Mr. Potter moved as an amendment for a Royal Commission to inquire into the administration of Relief in the Cotton Districts, and illustrated the subject in a speech full of information and ability. He censured the anomalous course hitherto pursued. Far from casting any reproach on the working classes, he bore generous testimony to their docility and endurance; arguing throughout that they would still be found ready to work if work were found for them, and deprecating earnestly the legislative indifference that looked unmoved on a state of things so full of social and moral danger. He ended by proposing a Commission of Inquiry into the administration of Relief, with the view of ascertaining how a general system of public employment might be organized.

I can sympathize fully with the honest vexation you betrayed, at the censure on your Department implied in this speech. It has been a Parliamentary tradition since the days of Lord North, that whatever goes amiss, a Minister should look pleasant when told of it; and as the observance of the maxim kept a noble joker in his place till the American Colonies were lost, I dare say no better rule can be found in cases where things are really so bad that they cannot be mended, and Ministers are really so worthless that they do not care. But this was not your case; and I frankly own that for one, I was exceedingly glad to perceive how much you had been put out for the moment, by the sharp criticisms of the Member for Carlisle. I should have heartily despised you had you affected not to feel them; and all the more because, as applicable to yourself individually, you felt them to be unjust. Official equanimity in ordinary circumstances is doubtless a great help to the transaction of business; and if phlegm does not naturally form a large ingredient in one's nature, it is of course very commendable that a public man

should be able to wear at will the enamel of complacency. Yet I should not place much confidence in one who was never caught without his varnish on. I think I understand your mortification at hearing yourself confounded with the crowd of indifferentists, whom during the two previous Sessions you had failed to awake to a sense of the urgent need of Lancashire, and without whose legislative co-operation you could do little more than watch and wait. You were vexed at this; and you looked and spoke it. I recall the incident in your praise. But your chagrin had its compensations: you saw that at length the wished-for opportunity had come, and you were prompt to seize it. After dwelling on certain of the topics raised in discussion by Mr. Potter, and placing some of the facts relied on by him in a somewhat different point of view, you proceeded to meet his recommendation with a counter proposal, to which none ventured to object. Instead of abiding the result of preliminary investigation, Government had resolved to send down forthwith a civil engineer, of undoubted competency, to report as speedily as possible what

public works of utility might be fitly undertaken in each locality; and a measure they said would be meantime prepared to facilitate their accomplishment. "They had been asked whether they would not inquire: they would do better—they would act." The representatives of Lancashire were only too glad to accept the counter bidding. Mr. Rawlinson, a man eminently qualified for the task, was sent at a few hours' notice into Lancashire to set on works which every one in the county felt and knew ought to have been begun eighteen months before, but which the most sanguine could not hope to see commenced for many more months to come. Mr. Rawlinson did all that in him lay, and did it well. Nevertheless, several weeks elapsed before his preliminary reports were complete; and it was not until the 8th of June that the salutary measure, thus tardily conceded, was submitted to the House.

At the end of a year and a half Legislative lassitude had discovered, that the true thing would be to furnish the unemployed with useful out-of-door work, which the people would have all along accepted gladly

throughout Lancashire. Mr. Farnall, never wanting in recommendations of what had been resolved upon, had lately found out that the Distressed Districts “presented available and profitable resources for the employment of the people on public and private works of utility ; but that hitherto no Corporation, no public body, no great landed proprietors, had attempted to convert these resources into a means of setting the able-bodied men to work for remunerative wages ;” although, as he energetically insisted, such employment “would have been acceptable to the workpeople, advantageous to the ratepayers, and serviceable to the interests of the community at large.”* But how did it happen that this was not discovered before? What is special inspection for, if it does not enable Government by means of it to look into the marrow of mischief; if it does not reveal the resources available for remedy, as well as chronicle the outward symptoms of disease? Here we have at last admitted, that what was most needed to be done under the

* Report, 10th April, 1863.—Ann. Rep. Poor Law Board, p. 69.

circumstances, had not been even attempted during the whole of the most exigent period of Distress. Was it never recommended or suggested during that time? I cannot tell; all I know is that not only is no trace of such recommendation to be found in the published reports of Mr. Farnall, but that in his published speeches to Relief Committees and Boards of Guardians, at the commencement of his special career of inspection in 1862, he held something very like the opposite language,—language calculated to deter those who might have been willing to wrestle manfully with the difficulty, ere it had reached gigantic proportions, and to dissuade all who wavered between the right and the wrong system from expressing their doubts or misgivings.

No sooner had the Bill become law, than various places took steps to avail themselves of its provisions. Within a month, public works estimated to cost 118,669*l.* were presented for approval by Blackburn, Dukinfield, Bollington, and Preston; and their execution was ordered by the Board. In September and October, twenty-eight applications from different

parishes and townships were made, to authorize works to the extent of 304,599*l.*, and in November and December eighteen separate proposals were sent in and approved, of a similar kind, for a further expenditure of 176,033*l.* Up to the 14th of January, 1864, the total estimate of the works ordered under the Act was 883,706*l.*; and when to these were added applications still under consideration, or disallowed as not coming properly within the meaning of the Statute, no less a sum than 1,037,228*l.* is reported by Mr. Rawlinson to have been applied for, within the first half-year after the making of the enactment. These works, being generally of the simplest and most obviously useful kind, were justly characterized as the fittest to employ a great number of hands willing to labour, who were not endued in any remarkable degree with specific skill. Necessarily their execution implied the employment of many individuals, not belonging to the class of Distressed Operatives: necessarily, too, there must be a considerable outlay in all of them, in other ways than on daily wages: still they were in the main eminently

suitcd to afford healthful, useful, and remunerative occupation to thousands who were standing all the day idle because no man had hired them. It was sad to think that before the requisite preliminaries could be completed for turning the first sod in each place, or laying the first stone, many more weeks of waste time must pass,—the strong and willing wondering why they were not given something to do, and the unreflecting marvelling at the stupidity or indolence, as they supposed, which caused local authorities to fumble over their portion of the business. Works intended for permanency, however, and to be executed at the public cost, cannot be commenced offhand, by men who have any regard for their obligations as trustees for the ratepaying community. Public charity is one thing ; public employment which may lighten the load of charity is another. The unreasoning and uncalculating heedlessness that would loosely mix both together has in it little of the merit of either, and is but a blundering burlesque upon both. The local municipalities and corporate bodies did rightly in hastening to put the Act into operation,

because they knew that the works were wanted, and that the sooner they were undertaken the better; but they did rightly also in refusing to be hurried about the examination of plans, the making of contracts, and the organizing of superintendence, before the works were actually begun. If all this took weeks and months, during which no practical relief reached the impatient and importunate mill hands, the blame must be laid not at the door of these authorities, but at that of Parliament, which failed in the performance of a manifest duty, in not having passed a Public Works Bill in February, 1862, instead of June, 1863. The tide was already going down, before channels were devised to facilitate its ebb. The whole of 1862 had passed without any attempt of the kind being made; and the whole of 1863 may be said to have passed, before any benefit in this respect was appreciable. In the return for the 26th of December, 1863, but 2250 Cotton Operatives are mentioned as having obtained employment on public works throughout the whole of Lancashire and Cheshire; and a considerable por-

tion of these had only occasional work, and were not regularly employed. Three months later the number of factory hands on the whole of the works did not exceed 3435.* A more lamentable confession of shortcoming under the circumstances cannot be conceived than these few but striking figures furnish.

Of the total sum authorized in the first half-year to be expended under the Act, 575,257*l.* was to be laid out in sewerage, and the formation and improvement of streets. The extent of sewerage thus contemplated was 129 miles; the area of street works was more than 500 acres. Nothing could be more erroneous, than the lazy and stupid presumption, that such works were not fit for the unaccustomed hands of the Operatives temporarily shut out of the Cotton mills. From the first, numbers of them showed not only perfect readiness to undertake their appointed share of the task, but great aptitude in learning how to perform it. As a striking instance of the skill which some of the factory hands had in a few weeks acquired, we are told that "an experienced Guardian

* Mr. Rawlinson's Second Report, 7th April, 1864.

actually laid before his Board a complaint that the men at work near his residence were not factory operatives; but upon inquiry it was found that he had formed an erroneous conclusion from their healthy-looking faces, and from the skilful manner in which they wielded their implements.”* Mr. Rawlinson adds, as a practical illustration of the moral and industrial superiority of such employment, to mere pauper task-work, that “while the men were working as ‘a labour-test’ they had earned seven-eighths of a penny per day; but within two days after the change was made from ‘test’ to ‘measured work’ the same men earned wages exceeding 2s. per day—the work being measured and priced on both occasions at the same rate.”† Let any one consider the loss of labour’s worth during the two unhappy years 1862 1863 that is here revealed. Economists are agreed in defining the wealth of a community to be the realized fruits of its labour. Here was an intelligent, apt, and willing population, through no fault of their own, bereft of their usual work; who during those

* Mr. Rawlinson’s Report, 20th January, 1864. † Ibid.

two dark and dismal years were left without alternative employ, though the means of employing them lay at their doors, and everybody felt and knew that the work needed to be done. For four-and-twenty months these ready-handed, docile, and alms-loathing Operatives were kept by Legislative omission from earning 2s. a-day, which would have made them happy and self-supporting: for four-and-twenty months they were left to themselves, or hunted to school, or kept at hateful and humiliating task-work, whereby on an average they did not earn more than seven-eighths of a penny a-day, and for the rest they were compelled to subsist on charity.

The Local Government Engineer testifies, from further experience, to the availability of factory hands for out-door labour, where that labour requires the acquisition of a certain amount of skill to perform it well. "This experience in Lancashire ought to inculcate a lesson for the future, namely, that unskilled men may soon be taught the use of tools, where practical means are found to furnish employment. The work must, however, be necessary and useful;


the men must have reasonable treatment and equitable payment,—if possible by measurement. All notion of work as a punishment must be removed, and the men must be intelligently and kindly taught. Many of the Lancashire Operatives, who never worked outside the walls of a Cotton mill before this period of distress, can now execute sewer and drain-trenching in a workmanlike manner, and even lay and joint sewer and drain-pipes equal to any skilled labourer.”*

Applications judged worthy of approval having been made for more than the 1,500,000*l.* authorized by Parliament, to be lent under the original Act of 1863, its further extension was wisely proposed last Session; and an additional sum of 350,000*l.* was thus made available for local improvements, by the absorption of waste labour. It is, alas! too true that, notwithstanding all our accumulation of capital, and all the devices, old and new, for its profitable employment, whose ingenuity and diversity cause us to marvel, a vast amount of working power, or what economists call labour, goes to waste, not of its own will, or by

* Second Report, 7th April, 1864.

its own fault, but by the imperfection of our industrial system, even at its best estate. The losses and the hardships thus arising are painful enough to contemplate. Honest, willing, and active men every now and then, miss their foothold' in one employment without being able to gain it in another, before they have undergone privations, trials, and oftentimes humiliations, the cankering relics of which, even after they get to rights again, are slow in passing away. The easiest way of dismissing thoughts of these things from the minds of those who govern is, of course, to repeat the stereotyped phrase, that they are inevitable as incidents of human society. I cannot remember any evil or scandal of our time, to which I have not heard the same terms applied. I am therefore slow in believing their correctness when I hear them now. But granting that, as regards a multitude of individual instances, it may be true, and that the very danger which such risk of loss implies, constitutes a sharp but useful incentive to exertion ; it surely does not follow that we are to make no effort to absorb, from time to time, the large masses of

labour that the vicissitudes of our high-pressure system of commerce bereave suddenly of employment. I am far from advocating the use of public money, whether as gift or loan, to constitute a permanent source of employment, at wages likely to detach men from other pursuits. That, I am sure, would be unadvisable. I plead for a temporary shelter, not a permanent home, for industry; but I am convinced that during the period of suspense or transition, use might be made of the time and of the labour of the rescued, to render good service and substantial benefit to the whole of the community. Is there not such a thing as spare work to be done as well as spare labour? Do not the disclosures of the last twelve months in Lancashire prove (if any proof were wanting) that there is abundance of necessary and useful work to be done in our great towns and cities, which nevertheless remains undone so long as trade is brisk and wages high? Will anyone who knows how the mass of the labouring population live, and in what sort of dens and styes they are condemned to dwell during the most prosperous times, deny that



there is abundance of work to be done, were it only for sanitary purposes, over and above that for which we can reasonably expect highly-taxed ratepayers spontaneously to pay? Ought we not therefore gravely to consider how we may avail of every opportunity afforded, by great dislocations of industry, to employ spare labour in spare work? Let the temporary nature of such employment be carefully kept in view; let the wages never be such as to compete with private enterprise; and above all, let the localities that are primarily and principally to be benefited, be left the decisive voice with regard to every undertaking. This is in fact, what you have done in Lancashire by your Public Works Acts of the two last Sessions; and for this you are entitled to public gratitude, for you have set an example of what may be safely and usefully done elsewhere throughout the kingdom.

It has I know, been said by some, and we shall, I dare say, hear it frequently said again, that financially your scheme will fail, first, because the loans from the Treasury will not be repaid; and secondly,

because the bulk of the money thus advanced will be sure to go in the wrong direction—in the purchase of land, in payment for materials, in profits of contractors, and in high wages to skilled workmen. I hope you will not be scared by these sinister forebodings. I do not say that they are groundless; but I am sure that with courage, energy, and perseverance, they may be thoroughly dissipated.

Objectors bid us look at the unsatisfactory operation of public works undertaken in Ireland, since the famine of 1847, and ask the parsimonious to inquire if all the money advanced for drainage and other purposes there has been repaid? This is not the place to enter into the many considerations such a question, if answered fairly and fully, would involve: nor is it necessary to do so. The cases are so widely and essentially different, that the analogy is one of phrases rather than of facts. If anybody will be at the pains to compare dispassionately the Statutes under which public works have been carried on in Ireland, with those passed on your recommendation

for Lancashire, he will be at no loss to discover the clue to the difference that exists between their practical operation. In the former, the power of the Central Executive is everything—that of the locality comparatively nothing. On this side of the Channel, the opposite rule prevails. Every proposal of public works in the Manufacturing Districts originates with a local and elective body, whose constituents are necessarily aware at the time of its nature, and of the extent of their own consequent liability. The design of each undertaking, and the cost of its construction, are alike determined and limited by local engineers, subject to the veto or approval of Government: nor can either be modified without the distinct and precise participation of both the Municipality and the Treasury.

It would be absurd to deny that in the working of a system not yet two years old, flaws may be discovered, and omissions requiring correction. The Municipal authorities of a township cannot always be expected to look at the mode of executing public works from the same point of view as the Guardians.

of the Poor. The advance of money at low interest by the Treasury, to be repaid on easy terms as to time, is certain to prove a powerful stimulus to large schemes of improvement; while a lower price offered by contractors, if allowed to employ their own deft and disciplined hands, will sometimes present a temptation to economize in the cost of construction. If wilfully and consciously yielded to, the latter must be condemned as a plain and positive breach of faith. But the errors and the sins of public bodies are seldom committed in this way. It has been truly said that the gradations are infinite, and the steps of transition impalpable, "from self-deception to voluntary fraud." This is especially true where moral responsibility is shared by a large number of individuals; and it is still more emphatically the case where the wrong is done, as it is said, *only* to the nation at large. What can it matter, if an additional 100,000*l.* be usefully spent under the provisions of a Statute whose preamble excludes the contemplation of such outlay? The locality will be benefited; the work will be done cheaply and well; and thrifty ratepayers will com-

mend their unjust Municipal stewards because they have done wisely. Other localities, if they ever come to know exactly how advantage was taken of the Act, may grumble a little, and ask why the same opportunity is not afforded to them. But nothing will come of their jealous complainings; and at the next civic feast, the health of the functionaries who wheedled the Government into grants at low interest, without exacting the performance of the implied condition respecting the employment of Factory hands, will be drunk with "cheers and much laughter." And when next the Mayor and Aldermen on bended knees confess their penitence, for having individually done what they ought not to have done, and left undone what they ought to have done, it will probably never occur to any one of them that in their collective capacity they have gone astray. Without illustration or proof we might take all this for granted, and consequently desire that some method were provided for preventing an abuse so probable. The controversy that has arisen between the Corporation of Manchester and the Board of Guardians for that city contains

epitome of all that need be said upon the subject.

While the Municipal Councils of other towns sought means to employ considerable numbers of Cotton Operatives, by the expenditure of the public loans, the civic authorities of the county metropolis appear from the first to have acted as if such employment on any great scale were impracticable. Public attention was early called * to the somewhat startling contrast presented by what was doing at Blackburn and at Manchester. The sum of 144,125*l.* had been granted to the former, in the expenditure of which 630 Factory hands were employed during the month of March: sums amounting to 155,000*l.* had been conceded to the latter, out of which but 450*l.* had been expended in the space of four months in wages to Factory hands. For a few weeks about 100 persons were thus employed; but towards the end of March the greater number had been sent back to the Guardians, not on account of any insubordination or indolence on their part, but because no work

* *Manchester Guardian*, 19th April, 1864.

had been provided for them which they could do. Forty-two only remained; and there were 516 able-bodied men, fit for out-door labour and desirous of obtaining it, who were then dependent for subsistence on Relief from Rates. These facts were formally brought under the notice of the Board of Guardians, in a report from Mr. Somerset, Assistant Clerk of the Union, and they led to much animated discussion. Some blamed the Contractors for preferring workmen trained to out-door labour; some reproached the City Council with not insisting on the observance of the opposite rule. The Chairman, Mr. C. H. Rickards, said "he believed it would be conceded that this Act was passed in order, in the first place, that work might be found for the unemployed Operatives; and secondly, that by their employment the rates might be materially reduced, and thus a great advantage conferred upon the smaller class of ratepayers. He thought the President of the Poor Law Board deserved great credit for the motives which led him to introduce this Bill in Parliament. The Act was passed in July; the Guardians had

had several interviews with the Corporation of Manchester on this subject, and so early as the latter end of October or the beginning of November, they were told that in a few weeks, there would be opportunities of putting these unemployed people on the works. He should not state his own convictions honestly, if he did not say that there had been unnecessary delay in this matter, and delay, as he was afraid, for the purpose of tiding over the social difficulties which existed, and ultimately placing these contracts for public works in the hands of the ordinary contractors. The benefit that was intended to be conferred by the Act had not been conferred. The Guardians had at one time 100 men on these works. It had been publicly stated by the Mayor of Manchester, that the men would not go to work. The Guardians had evidence that they not only went to work, but worked willingly, and obtained remunerative wages; and when sixty of them were unfortunately sent away, the whole without exception, expressed their very great regret at the circumstance. He had wished to relieve the Corporation from any improper

imputation which might be cast upon them, by a full, fair, and independently conducted investigation into this matter. Had his suggestion to that effect been accepted, it would have been known positively whether his assumptions were correct or incorrect; and if incorrect, he would have cheerfully admitted that he was wrong. But his proposition not having been accepted, and the non-employment of these people continuing, he thought it was a fair inference that there was some disinclination to find them occupation. He said this with great regret, and simply from a sense of public duty. He certainly thought that the unemployed Operatives of Manchester had good ground to complain of not being placed in the position of independent labourers." *

In answer to these charges it was stated broadly† that, when applying for the loans, fair notice had been given, that the nature of the works contemplated did not admit of unskilled labour being

* Report of proceedings of Board of Guardians, 26th March, 1864.

† See Letter of Mr. Heron, Town Clerk of Manchester, to Mr. W. G. Lumley, Assistant Secretary to the Poor Law Commission, 2nd April, 1864.

employed in them to any great extent; and that out of 130,000*l.* granted for water-works, seventy-five per cent. must be laid out on materials—63,000*l.* being paid for pipes alone.* These might have appeared to constitute reasonable grounds of objection to grants of the nature thus described; but they failed to meet the question—how came so little to be done in the wealthiest and most intelligent town of Lancashire, towards realizing the promise and the purpose of the Act?

The fact that these works were approved of by Mr. Rawlinson, as Government Engineer, will outweigh in most minds, the presumption that they were ill-chosen or unsuitable. I can readily conceive his reluctance to put a negative on the only undertakings of magnitude proposed by the Corporation of Manchester—undertakings which he may have fairly regarded as conducive in an eminent degree to sanitary objects, and capable, if faithfully executed, of affording occupation directly to a large number of unskilled hands, and indirectly to a still

* Proceedings of City Council, 26th Oct. 1864.

greater number of persons dependent upon them. He was bound to believe that a preference would be shown to the classes with reference to whose employment the law had been specially framed ; and it ought to be remembered, that it was not within his province to tell the Municipality to undertake a different description of works, nor within his power to compel them to undertake any at all. He could not have been expected to foresee all that subsequently happened, or to anticipate the indisposition shown to employ unskilled hands.

As summer advanced and trade improved, the number of able-bodied unemployed upon the Guardian's list fell away rapidly ; and the controversy still continuing, with regard to the proportion of skilled and unskilled labour employed by the Corporation, it became a question whether the Board had Cotton hands to send the civic contractors, were they disposed to take them. But whatever the number that happened to be on their list, everybody knew that within the precincts of the city and its suburbs, there was no lack of persons capable of such employ-

ment, unable to earn as artizans a decent livelihood. Round two or three decaying branches of the Cotton trade, many Operatives still desperately cling, though painfully conscious that less and less fruit is to be gathered therefrom every year. They were brought up as fustian-cutters or hand-loom weavers, and they shrink from abandoning the only handicraft they know. Insolent prosperity rails at their obstinacy in sticking to such ungrateful callings; and when every now and then it overtakes them on the highway, worn, naked, and half dead, it scoffs at their stupidity, and passes by on the other side. Yet it is not every day that the wisest of Samaritans can show these unhappy laggards on the path of a high-pressure time, how they are to get on better. It has been well said that "it is not quite so easy to do good as those may imagine who never try."* Sometimes signal adversity shows a way of escape; but what is opportunity if it be not intelligently used? The offer of out-door work to such men, of out-door work that would yield them twice as many shillings

* Granville Sharpe's Essays, p. 10.

a week as they were used to earn, would have been an inestimable blessing. They might have stared at the offer at first, and refused it: no matter. Half-a-dozen would have tried what the new thing was like, and others would have soon followed their example. All might not have had bodily strength at first to handle well barrow, pick, or spade: no matter, they would improve, and even if not, they would find their old companions in despondency getting a sound of hope in their voice, and a glow of health in their cheek; and this would have been something. Employment on Public Works might not last very long: no matter, it would last long enough to break the spell of thankless toil without alternative, whose thrall never had been loosed before; and this, too, would have been something. I speak not from any vague conjecture of my own, as to what might have done in regard to the wo-begone classes above named; but from the results of observation and experience, kindly imparted to me by men intimately acquainted with the condition of things in Manchester, and not given to exaggerate the practical effect of experimental

change of any description. How many wretched listeners to the town talk about public works during the last spring, summer, and autumn, would have gladly taken out-door work on them had they been allowed to do so! How bitter must be their feelings when they learn, as they are sure to do, the history of those works, how they came to be undertaken, and how they have been executed! How invincible will become the popular un-faith in the promises of public men, if pledges so circumstantial are broken, not only with impunity, but, as far as they know, without reproof!

With the recurrence of commercial depression towards the end of autumn, the number of able-bodied men engaged in all branches of the Cotton Manufacture applying for Union Relief, increased once more; and the Central Executive Committee, whose attention had been especially concentrated on questions connected with the operation of the Public Works Act, felt it to be their duty to expostulate with the City Council, on the small number of unskilled hands in their employ. Their good offices, and the continued

remonstrances of the Board of Guardians, were not wholly without effect. Nevertheless, during October, the average number of Cotton Operatives receiving wages from the contractors of the Corporation did not exceed 141, on works for which 135,500*l.* had actually been advanced by the Treasury. It might well be asked whether it was ever intended that eleven hundred pounds of the public money should be spent, in order to "find one Factory hand employment."* During the first week of November, sixty additional hands were taken on; and the Town Clerk was instructed to assure the Executive Committee that "it should be hereafter, as it had been theretofore, the anxious desire of the Council, fully to carry out the objects and intentions of the Legislature in passing the Public Works Act, so far as might be consistent with the paramount duty which they owed to those whom they represented."† In vindication however of their conduct, an elaborate statement of their proceedings was annexed, from which they

* *Manchester Examiner*, 8th Nov. 1864.

† Letter of Mr. Heron to Mr. McClure, 4th Nov. 1864.

wished it to be inferred, that they had in the outset hesitated long as to the justifiability of asking for loans under the Act; that they had been encouraged and even urged to do so by Mr. Farnall and Mr. Rawlinson, with whom they had previously conferred on the subject; that to these gentlemen, as well as to the heads of the Department in London, they had fully disclosed the nature of the undertakings, and the comparatively small proportion of the cost that would be expended in unskilled wages; and finally, that they had been assured that in applying, on behalf of Manchester, for a sixth of the entire loan voted by Parliament, to be laid out as they described, on new water-works, an additional cemetery, the paving of certain streets, and the formation of a public park, they were setting a highly meritorious example. Mr. Farnall, who was present when this remarkable *exposé des motifs* was read at the meeting of the Central Executive Committee,* does not appear to have disputed its accuracy, but contented himself with deprecating the supposition "that a similarly small

* 7th Nov. 1864.



proportion of Factory Operatives to that employed in Manchester, was being engaged on public works throughout the Cotton Districts. It was not so ; and he believed that the next report of Mr. Rawlinson would show, that Manchester stood almost in an isolated position in this matter." In confirmation of this view, Mr. H. Mason stated that at Ashton, out of 2000*l.* a month spent under the Act during the last ten months, three-fourths had gone in wages to the people.

I do not wish to enter into the discussion further. Its details would be unintelligible for the most part to those who are strangers to the locality ; and the value of each conflicting statement could only be appreciated correctly, by those who are acquainted with the character of the persons prominently engaged therein. The lesson I would draw from the dispute needs no nice appraisalment of competing estimates, or analytic search into motives. I would mend the law under which grants for relief works may in future be made ; or rather, I would have it settled beforehand, what the precautionary provisions of that law should be.

As it now stands, the Statute is clearly liable to be perverted grievously and grossly. In the main, I believe it has not been so perverted ; but, warned by experience, it will be the duty of the Legislature to guard, in the time to come, against the possibility of such perversion.

Circumstances, some of them but remotely connected with the industrial life of Lancashire, have during the last few weeks caused the owners of many Cotton Mills partially to suspend their working ; and the immediate effect has become palpable in the renewed increase of applicants for local Relief. In the week ending the 5th of November, there was an addition of 3348 in the twenty-seven manufacturing Unions ; and those who are perhaps best qualified to estimate the probabilities of the remaining portion of the winter, hesitate to express a hope that any permanent subsidence of this reflux of Distress can be reckoned on for a considerable time. Two things are deserving of note in connexion with this last chapter (as one hopes it may prove), in a painful though not uninteresting history. We cannot help

marking the readiness with which, on the first cessation of adequate wages, large numbers of persons now resort to Rates and Subscription Funds, many of whom, three years ago, would have shrunk instinctively from such public avowal of indigence. It would be a useless and ungracious task to upbraid these poor people, for not feeling any longer as they used to feel. But there is another consideration that serves materially to mitigate our regret in contemplating what is now passing before our eyes. Instead of relapsing into the dreary and demoralizing slough of idleness, wherein they were plunged in 1862 and 1863, a very large proportion of the able-bodied men and youths at present unable to obtain Factory employment, are afforded the alternative of healthful and useful occupation on out-door work. During the last days of October, no fewer than 4002 Factory Operatives were earning remunerative wages in this way, besides 2422 skilled hands of various trades and callings. "In addition to these," says Mr. Rawlinson, "I estimate the number engaged in getting stone and other

materials at not less than 2000, which will make a total of 8424, who, with their dependent families, will represent a population of from 30,000 to 40,000 persons deriving their subsistence from these works."* In some places, where re-paving or repair of the public ways has been preferred to new undertakings, there has necessarily been occupation found for comparatively few unskilled hands. On the whole, however, the example of Manchester has not proved contagious among the Municipalities of Lancashire. At Stockport, out of an expenditure of 13,779*l.* upon main sewers, 5319*l.* 15*s.* 3*d.* has been directly paid in wages to Cotton Operatives engaged upon these works; and "in several of the rural townships of the Stockport Union, out of a considerable expenditure upon highway improvements, fully seventy-five per cent. of the sum borrowed has been thus paid in wages of unskilled labour." The Corporation of Bolton asked and obtained loans to the extent of 55,000*l.*, including a sum of 10,000*l.* for the construction of a new reservoir fitted to afford a

* Report of 7th November, 1864.

better supply of water to the town. By what spirit they have been actuated, and in what manner they are expending the resources thus placed at their disposal, may be gathered from the fact, that about 7000*l.* has been directly paid in wages to men who were Factory Operatives, and whose earnings, after a few weeks' training on the works, have generally averaged sixteen shillings a week.* At Glossop a different species of work appears to have been devised by the Board of Guardians, namely, the draining and clearing of land for agricultural purposes, in addition to works of town improvement. Here, as might be expected, we find more than three-fourths of the entire amount—12,507*l.* 7*s.* 8*d.*, borrowed under the Act, paid in wages to Distressed Mill Hands.

Corroborative testimony to the willingness and worth of Factory labour is tendered on all sides. None, perhaps, is more striking than that of Mr. Brierley, Engineer to the Corporation of Blackburn, under whose superintendence works have been carried on, in accordance with the provisions of the Act,

* Report of 7th November, 1864.

upon a very extensive scale. Out of 16,766*l.* 18*s.* 11*d.*, he tells us that 11,024*l.* had been spent in wages to unskilled hands; and the works executed by labour of this description "have cost five per cent. less than similar works done by contract."* The numbers employed have varied from 161 to 914; and of late there have been about one thousand men glad to earn wages by task-work in this manner. From practical experience in several other places as well as at Blackburn, Mr. Brierley states unreservedly his conviction, that "so long as any of the undermentioned works remain undone, there need not be an able-bodied man unable to obtain 'a fair day's wage for a fair day's work':—Excavations for and laying sewers and drains; excavations for and ballasting and forming new roads and streets; improvement of roads and byeways, brooks and watercourses; formation of pleasure-grounds, parks, or cemeteries; drainage of land or buildings, &c."†

In proportion as you look with satisfaction on the

* Letter to *Manchester Guardian*, 14th November, 1864.

† *Ibid.*

general success of the system, called into being under your auspices, for providing relief by waged work for those thrown out of employment, instead of feeding them in idleness on Rates or alms, you must, I am sure, lament the fatality that left you, during the worst portion of the Cotton Famine, without this great instrument of good. From the peculiar means of information you officially possess, you doubtless see with painful clearness how many evils might have been averted, and how many benefits secured: but the sum of moral and social consequences of a wise law made in due season, none can know. It may be that the 1,850,000*l.* too late voted by Parliament, as a fund to be advanced in loans, would not have proved sufficient at the outset of the calamity; and that had you been in a position to act in the spring of 1862 with promptitude and vigour, under the ready-made provisions of a law for exceptional times, you would have had to invoke further aid on the part of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. That aid would hardly have been wanting; and as parsimony is certainly

not among the foibles of the present House of Commons, you would have had no difficulty in obtaining all you could have shown to be requisite. But taking the figures as they stand, and narrowing the case within the strictest limits, how great a difference would it have made, had you been able to offer Corporations and Boards of Guardians in Lancashire, the use of 1,850,000*l.* at three-and-a-half per cent., for the employment of spare hands on spare work, *before* these hands had been degraded by the badge of pauperism, and demoralized by daily contact with, if not connivance in, the practices of imposture! Far be it from me to say that which I do not know, and do not wish to believe, that public charity was in the main misspent, or that the old habits of honesty and independence, in the bulk of the working people, did not preserve them in a great degree from the contamination to which they were exposed. The readiness with which during last summer, great numbers of them went back to the mills, as soon as they were re-opened, and the extent to which, ostensibly

without aid, great numbers migrated and emigrated in search of other employments, during 1862 and 1863, ought not to be forgotten. But it were false kindness to the important and deserving class whose existence has been so lately in jeopardy, whose privations are not even yet over, and for whose safety in the time to come we are bound to take thought,—to underrate the mischiefs of the period through which they have recently passed. In one of the reports of the Assistant-Clerk to the Manchester Board of Guardians, a lamentable summary is presented, of the effect upon a mixed population of indiscriminate charity as a substitute for labour. “Almost every conceivable variety of fraud, it would appear, has been practised, as the reports of the special visitors prove every week. Children recently dead have been booked as living; children that never existed have been booked; children have been borrowed to make up families; concealment or misrepresentation of wages seems almost to have been the rule in some districts; men whose regular work was

at night have obtained relief, for want of work in the daytime; sick men (so represented) have been found drunk in bed; men discharged by employers for drunkenness, have obtained relief as decent, respectable artizans; persons have left employment avowedly because they could get a living easier by charity and Parish Relief than by work, &c. &c." Such were some of the fruits that ripened in the first twelve months of relaxed Poor Law discipline, and indiscriminating Relief without labour. No wonder that many believed five-and-twenty per cent. of those who were publicly relieved in Manchester were not fit objects of such charity.* It may be said that this state of things was peculiar, and that we have no evidence of like imposition elsewhere. From what I learned myself, during more than one recent visit to Lancashire, I fear that it would not be difficult to adduce proofs from other places, of analogous, though perhaps not identical, evils. Nor should it be forgotten, that the worst is not, after all,

* Arnold's History of the Cotton Famine.

describable under any rigid and repulsive definition of fraud. The lowering of the general tone of a community may be illustrated by glaring instances of successful deception ; but the magnitude of the mischief is really not measurable thereby. It is the silent and insidious eating away of men's faith in the worth of work, that is most to be dreaded and deplored : it is the beguiling them into a vague reliance upon the generosity of others, or upon the selfish fears of the State, that does most harm, and inflicts upon society the most immedicable wound.

It is because I entertain a deep conviction that these things are so, and a firm belief that by provident legislation, the recurrence of many of the evils we have lately witnessed may be wisely obviated, I have ventured to make to you this Appeal. If from an expiring Parliament you despair of obtaining that consideration for the subject which it deserves, would it not be possible at least, to prepare the way for the enactment of such a supplemental chapter to

1864.]

RETROSPECTIVE ENQUIRY.

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the Poor Law Code as I have ventured to recommend, by directing a full and impartial enquiry to be made into the administration of public relief in Lancashire during the last three years?

I have the honour to be,

With sincere respect,

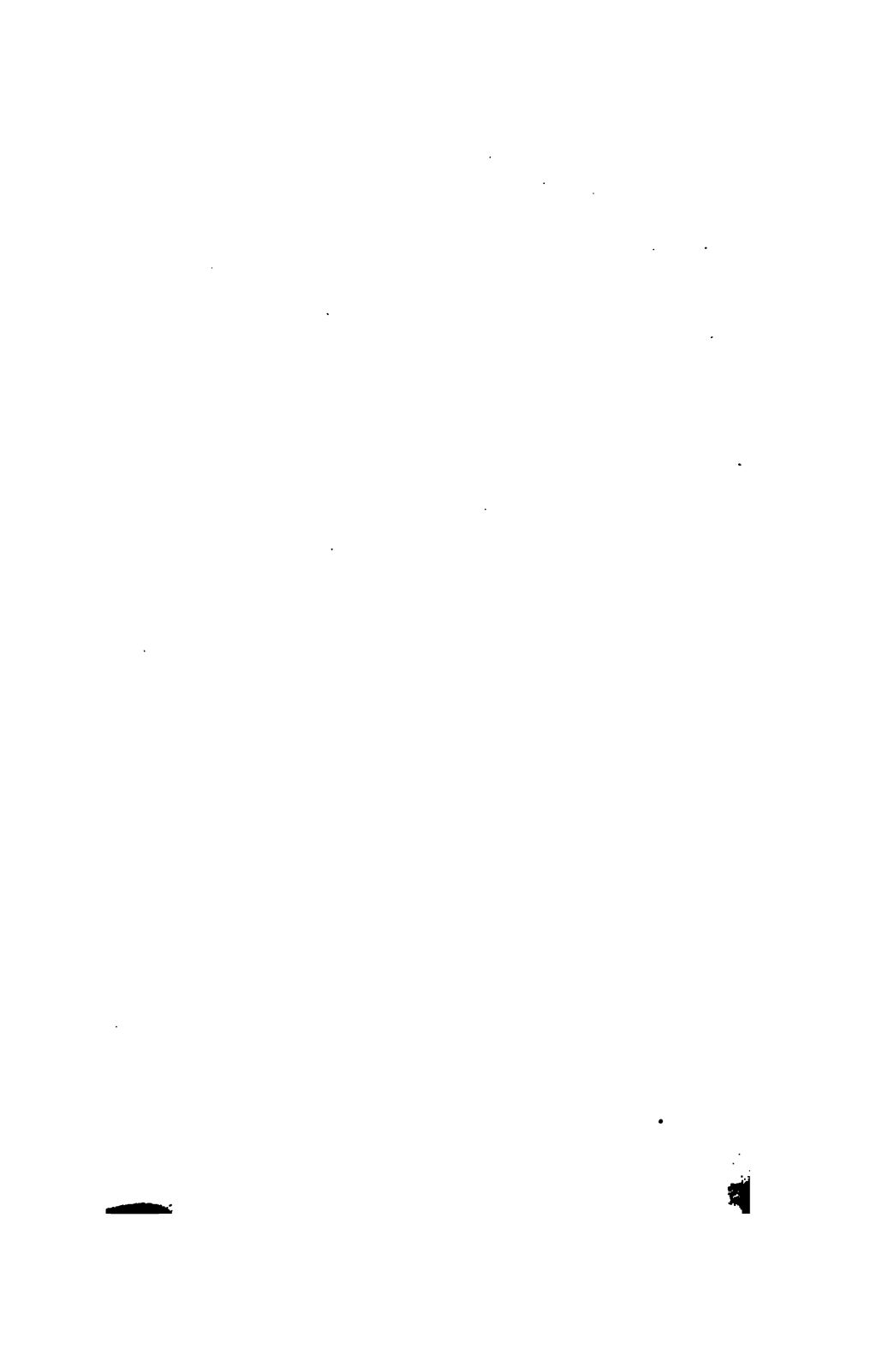
Your very faithful Servant,

W. T. M. TORRENS.

26, ST. GEORGE'S ROAD,
ECCLESTON SQUARE, S.W.


25th November, 1864.





APPENDIX.

SINCE the foregoing observations were in type, I have received the Report made on the 21st November to the Central Executive Committee, by their Honorary Secretary, Mr. J. W. Maclure. Of the many eminent services rendered by that untiring advocate of public benevolence, few are more likely to be gratefully remembered than his careful compilation from time to time of the statistics of Distress; without which all subsequent enquiry would have been difficult, and every general inference liable to controversy. I do not think it necessary to quote the details given by Mr. Maclure; but his summary of results will furnish, perhaps, the best epitome of the financial history of the Cotton Famine:—



*“Fund for the Relief of Distress in the
Manufacturing Districts.*

“Manchester, November 21st, 1864.

“MY LORDS AND GENTLEMEN,—

“The accompanying Tables afford a comparison between the ordinary Expenditure for the Relief of the Poor in the Twenty-eight Unions of the Cotton District, and that of the years which have been affected by the Cotton Famine.

“The excess of Expenditure over 1861 (which may be taken as an average year) in In-door Maintenance and Out-door Relief, including that of the Local Relief Committees, in the year ended Lady Day 1862, was 40,221*l.*, in 1863 1,287,597*l.*, in 1864 949,554*l.*, and during the six months ended Michaelmas 1864 over 300,000*l.*—being a total excess of Expenditure of 2,577,372*l.* in the three years and six months during which the present exceptional state of Distress has continued.

“During the *three* years ended Lady Day 1864, the Guardians expended in the Relief of the Poor 1,937,928*l.*, and the Local Committees 1,372,454*l.*, making a total of 3,310,382*l.*, whilst in 1861 the Guardians of the Poor spent only 313,135*l.*

“Of the amount received by the Committees, 289,938*l.* was from Local sources; but in addition to that amount, the Central Committee received 276,453*l.* in subscriptions from the Cotton Districts; and it is estimated that no less a sum than

220,000*l.* was locally distributed in private charity, beyond the large amount voluntarily remitted by manufacturers and property owners for cottage rents.

“For the information referring to the Guardians’ Relief I am indebted to Mr. Purdy, of the Poor Law Board.

“ I have the honour to be,

“ My Lords and Gentlemen,

“ Your most obedient servant,

“ JOHN WM. MACLURE,

“ *Hon. Sec.*”

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